

Running Title: *Akrasia* and Domestic Violence

*Love Shouldn't Hurt:*

*Akrasia* as an Explanation for the Perpetration of Domestic Violence

By

Elizabeth A. Murad

\*\*\*\*\*

Submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for  
Honors in the Department of Philosophy

UNION COLLEGE

June, 2016

## Table of Contents

Table of Contents.....	i
Dedication.....	ii
Abstract.....	iii
Chapter 1: Love Shouldn't Hurt.....	1
Chapter 2: Non-Rational <i>akrasia</i> and Intimate Partner Violence.....	10
Chapter 3: <i>Akrasia</i> and Ending Domestic Violence.....	24
Bibliography: .....	35

*To Alex, her family, my family: Susan, Michael, and David Murad,  
and my advisor Robert Baker.*

## ABSTRACT

MURAD, ELIZABETH A. Love Shouldn't Hurt: *Akrasia* as an Explanation for the Perpetration of Domestic Violence.  
Department of Philosophy, June 2016.

ADVISOR: Robert Baker

Domestic Violence (DV) is a prominent issue that affects people of all demographics, and can be defined as the perpetration of psychological, emotional, physical, or sexual abuse against (*typically*) an inferior other. A dear friend, Alex, lost her life at the hands of her boyfriend of almost two years, and I still struggle to understand how one could do such an atrocious thing to a loved one? The Perpetrator, Clayton, claimed that he “just snapped” when he “killed [his] girlfriend.” It is from this case, and more specifically the statement: “I just snapped,” that I have based my research; I explore the relationship between Aristotle’s theory of the *angered impetuous akratic*, and its relation to the perpetration of Domestic Violence. The impetuous akratic is one who acts against one’s best interest due to a cognitive error in which the emotions cloud one’s ability to reason and deliberate. Emotions and reason arise independently, and thus, can be thought of as competing for rule over the self. The perpetrator, Clayton, clouded by his anger, was unable to act according to anything other than his overwhelming anger. With reflective thought, *akratic* actions such as Domestic Violence may be avoided.

**Chapter 1: Love Shouldn't Hurt**

*“True Friendship is seen through the heart, not through the eyes.” –Nietzsche*

I received a phone call on the morning of the 29<sup>th</sup> of September 2012 that changed how I think, feel, and am: everything. I was informed about the death of a dear friend, Alexandra (*Alex*). I could not fathom this information, I had known Alex my whole life; there was no way she was no longer alive. I immediately called her phone and after the third time the recording of her apologies played, I realized that she was never going to answer. The news of her untimely death was true, and there was nothing I could do.

Everyone who had the opportunity to know Alex described her as her as someone who was beautiful on the inside and out, who could make anyone smile at any time, with a kind heart and a loving personality. She lost her life to her boyfriend of over a year, Clayton, and I struggle to understand not only how such an atrocity of a “vicious and brutal attack” is possible, but also how it could happen to someone I loved. Alex’s death inspired me to research the phenomenon of domestic violence: how can one abuse and/or kill another one claims to love?

Alex’s trial lasted from her death in September 2012 to the final “guilty” verdict in August 2014. Her death was discovered due to her mother’s instincts, and a lack of communication between the two. Her mother called the school concerned, and on a “welfare check-up” by campus safety, the officers entered Alex’s dorm room to “a scene beyond description,” with a “bloody and unrecognizable” body, later to be identified as Alex. The perpetrator, Clayton, turned himself in almost immediately after fleeing the scene, and was picked up by the police at a New York thruway rest stop.

After interrogating Clayton, it was found that the couple had been at an off-campus party at which they argued the entire time over “stupid stuff.” This argument

## *Akrasia* and Domestic Violence

became more problematic when Clayton was ticketed for an open container – which he claims was Alex’s to begin with. Clayton reported that he “just snapped” as he began to beat her with his fists, and other items around the room, and when he recognized Alex’s breathing was labored, that it “sounded like something was blocking” it, he decided to take the near-by clothes iron and “make the noises stop.” He claims that he “didn’t want the girl [he] loved to suffer,” and that “[He] never intended any of this,” all the while admitting, “I killed my girlfriend. I wasn’t even drunk. I just snapped.”<sup>1</sup>

\*\*\*

Famously known for his fascination with virtue, Aristotle re-defined virtue ethics, asserting that humans have a natural drive for the good life, which he referred to as *eudemonia*: the result of pleasure through wellbeing and happiness, or virtue. He argues that reason is necessary in becoming virtuous, for reason discerns between good and evil, and determines the principles that ought to govern an individual’s behavior. Therefore, a consensus would exist between those of “good up-bringing and experience in life,” on what it is to be virtuous. Through a stable disposition of reason and rationality, one can be certain to be virtuous.

Although one ought to follow what reason discerns as *good*, it is common for people to follow desires that do not align with reason, and thus leads one astray from virtue. Aristotle refers to such instances as *akrasia*, and “[a]n *akratic* person goes against reason as a result of some *pathos* (emotion),<sup>2</sup>” or a lack of reason. *Akrasia* is a failure of control, modernly referred to as the weakness of will. The paradox is as follows: an individual knows that X is against one’s best interest, yet, against this reasoned judgment,

---

<sup>1</sup> All quotes to this point: Hastings, D. (2014, May 31).

<sup>2</sup> Kraut, Richard, (Spring 2016 Edition).

## *Akrasia* and Domestic Violence

does X anyway because of one's overwhelming desires pulling the individual against reason, and away from the virtuous life. It is this phenomenon, *akrasia* that I explore in relation to the perpetration of domestic violence. It is my intuition that Alex's case, and cases of the like are the result of intense emotions, like anger: *Emotional Akrasia*.

Since its conception in the fourth century B.C.E., scholars have been investigating and debating the possibility and intricacies of *akrasia*, such as the relevance a theory created by a man who lived in a vastly different world could have in ours of today. One line of contention against the existence of *akrasia* is that of the inability to resist following what one has reasoned to be good. The idea is, if one *knows* what one ought to do, one cannot willingly go against that knowledge, or, cannot *willingly go to the bad*. That is, if one knows the virtuous thing to do is pay for all acquired items, and that it is wrong to steal; then the individual would not be able to *willingly* steal. Acting virtuously is just as automatic as following simple rules of arithmetic. If one *knows* that  $2+2=4$ , one cannot believe, nor act on the false, or wrong belief that  $2+2=5$ . One is unable to fully believe that  $2+2=5$ , no matter how hard one tries: even if one is offered a large sum to believe such a statement. It is a different case if one has been coerced, such as a threat against one's life if the robbery is not completed. It is also a different case if one has a psychological illness, such as gluttony; if one were to eat ten pizzas everyday when one knows such behaviors are dangerous. These scholars believe that such cases ought not be included in the discussion surrounding *akrasia*, for they are of different essences. Another argument against the plausibility of *akrasia* is related to the belief that no desire can exist independently of reason. One must engage in cognitive activity, linked to reason, to experience a desire. According to these scholars, since desires are linked to

## *Akrasia* and Domestic Violence

reason, one cannot desire to do one thing, while simultaneously non- desiring to do another, or the opposite thing.

I argue against such standpoints, and claim that instances of *akrasia* are not only possible, but also common. Individuals that act *akratically* are epistemically deficient. As David Owens explains in his study of the subject, “Epistemic *Akrasia*,” “the *akratic* is not compulsive, the agent has the ability to control one’s self, conforming to the judgment one has made, but somehow fails to exercise the ability to either judge, or commit to the judgment.”<sup>3</sup>

An often-used example of *akrasia* is that of a cigarette smoker. Not only do the two conflicting desires exist together in the individual, but it is also that the individual has judged one of those choices as wrong, or to go against reason. The individual *knows* that smoking is detrimental to one’s health, and thus desires to refrain from smoking. The individual may even makes testimonies of quitting the bad habit, but continuously fails to do so. The *akratic* both desires to smoke the cigarette and also desires to refrain from smoking the cigarette, but chooses the cigarette. The individual’s desire to smoke the cigarette seems to *cover* and *hide* the desire to refrain from smoking, which may make the individual appear to have forgotten the resolution, or disregard the reasoned conclusion: *akrasia*. It is not that the *akratic* deliberately choose to act *akratically*, but that the individual was unable to recognize an alternative. The smokers overwhelming desire to smoke pushed down and made the individual blind to the desire of quitting smoking.

While giving into a non-rational desire such as smoking a cigarette is detrimental to one’s health, it is not of significant moral worry. Modern philosopher Philip Petit

---

<sup>3</sup> Owens, David (2002).

## *Akrasia* and Domestic Violence

observed that many philosophers that have written on *akrasia* since the 2000's have admitted it unlikely that each nuance of *akrasia* has been properly identified, a proposition with which I agree. I will be discussing the existence of emotional *akrasia*, which functions in a similar fashion as *epistemic akrasia*. In *emotional akrasia*, it is not the desire of a physical satiation, such as the cigarette that impedes the individual's ability to act rationally, but rather, an emotional desire, such as to retaliate when angry, lie in bed all day when sad, or ignore responsibilities when happy, that impedes one's ability to act in accordance with rational desires. In certain instances of domestic violence, similar to the case of my friend Alex, the abuser's anger is so great that it blocks the ability to recognize the rational desire to react in a calm and reasonable fashion, and causes the individual to instead lash out in a fit of anger, or act *akratically*.

Emotions have often been referred to as “fuzzy” concepts, such that they are difficult to define. These concepts seem to be understood in terms of lists of features that are more or less central to the concept itself. Example: emotions are the experience of feelings, such as happiness, sadness, anger, and fear. While we inherently know what an emotions is, due to the experience of the emotions, we are unable to supply an accurate definition. Although there still exists mystery when it comes to the understanding of emotions, many scholars have agreed that they can be described as, “[c]omplex, episodic, dynamic, and structured... [experiences affecting] the individual's disposition to think, feel, and act.”<sup>4</sup> Emotions are responses to important aspects and happenings in one's life, and thus direct one's attention to such aspects, causing one to react and respond in a way that is beneficial to the individual, unless, of course, the emotion is not of proportionate appropriateness and magnitude, which can cause an individual to act *akratically*.

---

<sup>4</sup> Peter Goldie

## *Akrasia* and Domestic Violence

In this work, I do not intend to give an exhaustive analysis, and will not merely critique the current approaches to *akrasia*, but rather, will provide an alternative approach to argue that *akrasia* may be responsible for some cases of Domestic Violence: it was not the case that the perpetrator, Clayton's, desire to commit the atrocious crime was stronger than his desire to refrain from doing so, but rather, that he was unable to recognize all available courses of action due to his overwhelming anger. Therefore, I will narrow my focus to the *angered impetuous akratic*, a term I will describe in detail, or as I refer to it: *emotional akrasia*. I do not claim to create a theory of the emotions; I will leave that task to Neuroscientists who have the job of developing a detailed understanding of how the mind works. As a philosopher, however, I intend to show how Aristotle's model of *akrasia* can be applied to explain the phenomenon of domestic violence in a way that points to the emotions as its cause.

Before one can understand the complexity of Aristotle's *akrasia*, it is important to analyze the works of his mentor and main academic influence, Plato. Many of Aristotle's theories appear to have roots in the concepts Plato sets forth in his works. First described in the *Republic*, Plato developed a theory of the tripartite soul such that there are three independently functioning souls seeking satiation of different categories of desires. Some skeptics deride this division of the soul because they *over-intellectualize* the concept. In my discussions of the divisions of the soul, I do not claim that one's soul is literally divided, that there are physical parts, but rather that the soul, or mind, is responsible for certain functions independently of other functions: the combination of the three comprises the entire soul (mind). Plato's tripartite soul includes the rational, appetitive, and spirited parts, which desire truth/wisdom, honor, and bodily pleasure, respectively.

Similarly, in his book-length study of morality, *Nichomachean Ethics*, Aristotle distinguishes three paths to happiness, which include the way of contemplation, the refined political aim of honor, and the “slavish way of pleasure.” Both advocate the use of intellect, or truth to reach virtue and true happiness. Aristotle coins the term *eudaimonia* as a state of true pleasure, which arises from living rationally and virtuously. Plato has a similar concept in his *Republic*, which is that of the “philosopher king” that would be the fully virtuous, and knowledgeable person most equipped to *rule the city*. A parallel has been drawn between Plato’s Ideal City in the *Republic* and the *ideal self* or *soul*, such that the rational desires ought to rule the self to reach virtue; a notion that is reflected in Aristotle’s *Nichomachean Ethics*.

Although the two commit to the tri-separation, the significant distinction is between not three, but two parts: that of the rational and non-rational desires, soul. The rational desires ought to be satiated, while the non-rational desires are those that ought to be avoided. Both Plato and Aristotle warned others against immersing themselves in *desires of every sort, all pains and pleasures of the soul, and passions*,<sup>5</sup> i.e., the emotions. Upon analysis of the two Philosophers in conjunction, I assert that the emotions ought to be considered a function of the non-rational soul. Such a distinction is crucial in regards to the understanding of *emotional akrasia*, for the emotions, being a function of the non-rational soul, are able to pull an individual away from rationality and virtue. For both, however, training and practice can condition the rational desires to communicate with and influence the non-rational soul. This notion is important because it offers hope that one can overcome the non-rational desires that result in *akratic* actions. The basis for this

---

<sup>5</sup> These terms are used in the *Republic*, *Laws*, *Timeaus*, *Philebus*, and the *Protagoras*.

## *Akrasia* and Domestic Violence

intuition comes from a claim that Plato stakes out in the *Republic* to the effect that if one develops rational capacities, the agent will then discover one's true (rational) desires, allowing actions to be conflict free and the soul to be virtuous: to act in accordance to one's best interest rather than against it.

In the subsequent chapters, I discuss the natures of the rational and non-rational soul to explain *why* the emotions ought to be considered a function of the non-rational soul. I then discuss the nature of *akrasia*, and all that it entails. Once an understanding of *akrasia* is established, I argue that perpetrators of domestic violence can be considered *impetuous akratics*, such that their emotions inhibit their ability to act with reasoned deliberation. I argue not only that *akrasia* can result as a function of the emotions, but also that it can serve to explain certain instances of domestic violence, such as that of my friend, Alex.

This research was inspired by the beautiful life of a dear friend, Alex, but is also a tribute to all victims and survivors of domestic violence. The basic research and understanding that I have on the topic of domestic violence is from previous work I have done through the Union College Scholars Program completed in July 2014. Domestic Violence is a prominent issue that many men and women have suffered throughout history. It can be defined as the perpetration of psychological, emotional, physical, or sexual abuse against (*typically*) an inferior other. Domestic violence can exist in any and all types of relationships, including but not limited to: parent/guardian-child, child-parent/guardian, friend-friend, or lover-lover: which is referred to as Intimate Partner Violence (IPV). IPV can occur between any intimately involved couple such as with a spouse, boyfriend, girlfriend, etc.

## *Akrasia* and Domestic Violence

Intimate partner violence has been analyzed from the perspective of such expert lenses as psychology, sociology, history, philosophy, and many others. I intend to take a different approach to understanding IPV, one that has not yet been explored in the literature. It is by studying one case, that of Alex, and more specifically the statement: “I just snapped,” that I focus my research. I will be exploring the relationship between Aristotle’s theory of the angered impetuous person, and intimate partner violence. It is my hope that by the conclusion of this paper the reader will share my intuition that not only is *akrasia* possible, but that it is a logical explanation for domestic violence. I believe and thus will argue that through reflective thought and rational practice, one can become aware of the non-rational influence emotions have on one’s morality, and thus use one’s rational abilities to suppress the overwhelming emotional desires that create instances of impetuous *akrasia*, including intimate partner violence.

**Chapter Two: Non-Rational *Akrasia* and Intimate Partner Violence**

*“The ignorance involved in involuntariness is caused by external factors, whereas it has an internal cause in akrasia: the passions. Like the involuntary but unlike the wicked, akratics regret their actions; they know and feel that they were wrong.”*

~ Dylan Murray<sup>6</sup>

According to Plato’s split-soul theory, there is a limited amount of energy in the soul, such that only one part can be energized and active at a time, thus the mind can be thought of as fighting for the satiation of certain desires. Plato defends his split-soul theory in relation to cognitive dissonance: the human tendency to, as it were, be of two minds about something. The *Republic* describes this as the principle of non-opposition in which, “[t]he same thing will not be willing to do or undergo opposites in the same respect, in relation to the same thing, at the same time” (436b8–9). To be clear: Plato argues that there *must* be at least two sources of desire existent in a single individual for conflicting desires to exist simultaneously: rational and non-rational. The non-rational and rational parts can be thought of as *fighting* for control over the self. Plato describes this phenomenon in the *Timeaus* as follows: “[o]ne part, if remaining inactive and ceasing from its natural motion [desire], must necessarily become very weak, but that which is trained and exercised, very strong. Wherefore we should take care that the movements of the different parts of the soul should be in due proportion.”<sup>7</sup> The part of the soul that gets the energy, or the most energy, will be the part that *rules* the self. The more one engages in satiating desires of a specific sort, the more prominent those desires will be, and all other desires will be pushed down. The desires that become prominent, then, will become the *normative desires* for that individual, such that the individual can be expected to engage in activities that cater to those desires. It is important to understand

---

<sup>6</sup> Murray, Dylan (2014).

<sup>7</sup> Plato. *Timeaus*

## *Akrasia* and Domestic Violence

to which part of the self, the rational or non-rational, is responsible for each desire. A distinction must be made between what it means to be non-rational versus to be irrational. Non-rational refers to the absence or lack of reason, while the use of poor, bad, or to go against reason, is to be irrational, which is *not* a division of the soul. One *can* behave irrationally, or, against reason, referred to by Plato as a weak *akratic*. This sort of individual may know the consequences of actions and that it is not in one's best interest, but engages in the action anyway. Such a situation exists in domestic violence, but is not a part of this analysis. This paper focuses on *akratic* action that results in domestic violence when the perpetrator fails to reason, and acts solely on one's passions, emotions. Emotions, not aimed at truth or wisdom must necessarily be the function of the non-rational soul.

The basis for my intuition that the emotions are a function of the non-rational soul comes from the ancient philosophers, in addition to modern understanding of the emotions. It is not the task of this paper to say what the experience of an emotion is *like*, but rather, the effect they have on the experiencer. The emotions are complex for they influence and are influenced by many aspects of one's psyche and psychosomatic self, such as physiology, perceptions, experiences, beliefs, feelings, desires, etc. The idea is, if you are a happy person, you will likely smile often, engage in healthy activities, and help others. Similarly, if you are an individual that smiles often, engages in healthy activities, and helps others, you are likely to be happy. Emotions arise from a relationship between beliefs and desires, which can be translated to information and motivation. Michael Bratman explains that, "when glad that *p*, A believes that *p*, and A desires that *p*. ... [T]he belief and desire concern a common topic" (79) that gives rise to the emotion. This

logic is not only consistent in modern works, but is also referred to in Book II of the *Rhetoric* when Aristotle discusses the beliefs and desires at the root of emotions.

The beliefs one holds are an important aspect of the self for not only do they determine the emotions one experiences, but also, many identify themselves through their beliefs. [I *am* a liberal; I *am* Christian; I *am* republican; etc.] When it comes to belief formation, there are many ways in which one could obtain the beliefs one has. Without diving too deep into the study of belief formation, it is necessary to discuss the evaluative process that goes into belief and desire formation in to understand. Beliefs give rise to desires that are related to the belief, which creates the basis for an emotion: a desire to make the world fit how one would like it to be. One's perception plays a role in one's evaluative capacities such that one's evaluation of an object or state of affairs is dependent on how one perceives that thing in relation to the world and the self. The belief is the information one has about an object or state of affairs, which once combined with motivation, turns into action. This is problematic, for perceptions are often unreliable.

The most prominent evidence of unreliable perceptions comes from optical illusions, which are characterized by visually perceived images that differ from objective reality. In the instance of an optical illusion, one simultaneously believes the thing is how it appears, as well as how it calculates to be. Because beliefs are the basis of desire, contradictory beliefs such as optical illusions result in contradictory desires, such as cognitive dissonance, which is detrimental to ability of attaining virtue. Beliefs formed from information provided by the sensory system must be non-rational, for they seem to *compete* with the information from rational calculations.

One may have difficulty finding the similarity in cognitive dissonance in the form of optical illusions to cognitive dissonance in the form of emotional desires; that is, the similarity in dissonance of the body and of the soul, or mind. This parallel, however, can be found in many of both Plato's and Aristotle's works. The *Philebus* does not make explicit the distinction between rational and non-rational desires in the same way I have been discussing, but instead makes the distinction between pains and pleasures of the body from those of the soul, which has been understood as the same. The dialogue in the *Philebus* begins by explaining that what is natural or *normal* is pleasurable, and when the norm is disturbed, there will be a rise in pain. "[w]hen the harmony in animals is dissolved, there is also a dissolution of nature and a generation of pain."<sup>8</sup> This rise in pain may be of either the body or soul. The existence of optical illusions and other forms of cognitive dissonance show that the sensory system, a function of the body, is faulty, and therefore, non-rational, while calculation and reason, a function of the mind, is rational. Pains and pleasures of the mind are similar in nature to those of the body: non-rational. There are individuals that find pleasure in pain, as well as there are individuals that find pain in pleasure.

In the *Timeaus*, Plato asserts:

“there are two desires natural to man, one of food for the sake of the body, and one of wisdom for the sake of the diviner part of us. Then, I say, the motions of the stronger, getting the better and increasing their own power, but making the soul dull, and stupid, and forgetful, engender ignorance, which is the greatest of diseases.”<sup>9</sup>

---

<sup>8</sup> soc. Philebs

<sup>9</sup> timeaus

## *Akrasia* and Domestic Violence

There exists no universal truth to these concepts, only societal norms. Plato emphasizes that *all* evaluative appearances and perceptions of pain and pleasure are a function of the non-rational soul, which gives rise to non-rational desires such as emotions. When it comes to an *emotional conflict*: the rational part of the self calculates it better to follow calm deliberation, while the non-rational part longs to indulge in violent emotion. Rorty explains how conflicts of desires: *akrasia*, arise by placing emphasis on the desires of the different parts of the soul. If one perceives to have been wronged, the spirit, through the non-rational part of the soul will desire to avenge the honor of the self, the appetitive part will desire the gratification that comes from revenge, and the rational part will desire to follow calm reason. (Rorty 1970).

\*\*\*

Translating to a weakness of will, or incontinence, *akrasia* is most commonly understood as a state of mind in which one acts against one's better judgment. Aristotle first makes reference to *akrasia* in the *Nicomachean Ethics* in which he describes the motivational struggle experienced by the akratic: "They (the *akratics*) evidently also have some other [part] that is by nature something apart from reason, clashing and struggling with reason." NE1102b 20<sup>10</sup> He then makes a distinction between two forms of *akrasia*: the *impetuous akratic* and the *weak akratic*. The *akratic* who is weak will act against what has been reasoned to be the good, due to an alternative that is more appealing. The weak *akratic* is unable to act in accordance with reason, while recognizing what the reasonable thing to do is. The *impetuous akratic*, on the other hand, fails to reason altogether, either due to the inability to recognize all available information, or due to the clouding of rationality by the passions. Both types of *akratics* forfeit their ability to be a

---

<sup>10</sup> Fiecconi, E. C. (2013).

“fully” knowing being when acting *akratically*. That is, “[i]f you know that p, but you are unable, because of your state, to put your knowledge that p into use, then, in a sense, you both know and do not know that p.”<sup>11</sup> To be continent, an individual must recognize and act on the basis of all available information, thus, to be incontinent, one is either unable to see all available information, or only recognizes some of the available information.

Modern scholars use the term *unreflective consciousness*, or being *unreflectively conscious*, in ways that relate to the phenomena *akrasia*. We can ‘unthinkingly’ lash out in anger, or act in ways which we later regret. Aristotle has a similar understanding of being *unreflectively conscious* in ways that reveal that the individual is not exercising knowledge as one would in a reflectively conscious state:

“[t]hose who are asleep, mad or drunk, both have knowledge in a sense and do not have it. Moreover, those affected by feelings are disposed in such a way. For emotions, sexual appetites and some affections of these sorts clearly disturb the body as well, and in some men even produce fits of madness. It is obvious, then, that we should say that akratic people are in a condition similar to these.” (1147<sup>a</sup>10-24).

The *akratic*, forfeiting true knowledge, is similar to the drunk: the knowledge may be there, but in the drunken, or *akratic* state, only a mutated version of the knowledge is accessible. A drunk knows that driving under the influence is dangerous, but, after a few drinks and realizing that one needs to return home, the individual reaches for the keys without consideration to the consequences.

It is easy to recognize the notion of “having knowledge in a sense and not having it in another,” in relation to the drunk, for the drug impairs one’s cognitive abilities, but it is not as intuitive in relation to the experience of emotions. When it comes to an *emotional conflict*, the rational part of the self calculates it better to follow calm

---

<sup>11</sup> Pritchard, Duncan and Turri, John, (2014).

deliberation, while the non-rational part longs to indulge in intense emotion. Aristotle asserts that the emotions ought to be guided and shaped by reason and rationality, but that at times, the passions can get out of hand.<sup>12</sup> Reason guides one to the good, while emotions often derail that process. It is the instances in which one's emotions get out of hand, and are against reason, that one experiences an instance of *impetuous akrasia*. *Akrasia* constitutes a failure of control but not an absence of control. *Akratic* actions are intentional actions, but simultaneously, they are neither voluntary, nor are they involuntary. Although the addict lights one's own cigarette intentionally, the action is out of the agent's rational control.<sup>13</sup>

The *akratic* is unable to recognize all truly available options for action. The overpowering passions cloud one's rational desires, and one's ability to reason. In his *De Anima*, Aristotle describes just how the emotions can impede upon one's ability to reason, which is ultimately due to how the emotions affect the soul. When one is angry, for instance, one experiences a clenched jaw, fists, shaking, and a *boiling of the blood*. It is this bodily feeling, that is, of the blood boiling around the heart such that it can only experience and thus recognize that boiling. Any hope of reason is so small, that it cannot possibly overcome that heat – without conditioning, that is.

---

<sup>12</sup> Pettit, Philip (2003).

<sup>13</sup> Say I quit smoking cigarettes three weeks ago, just long enough to break a habit. To celebrate, I go out to town with friends, and at the end of the night, one of my friends takes out a pack, and not knowing I quit, offers one to me. I am frozen. What do I do? I really want that cigarette – I can smell the tobacco and it brings back the memory of how that tobacco has made me feel: good. On the other hand, I really want to stay away from cigarettes; there has been a long history of lung cancer in my family. After this internal struggle, I reluctantly accept the cigarette.

## *Akrasia* and Domestic Violence

Emotions guide one's attention, and thus make the object of the emotion the center of thought. While they do not create a complete *blackout* of the agent's reason, emotions can cloud one's ability to reason, allowing reasons in favour of the *akratic* action to 'rule the mind.' "[W]e routinely assume that action necessarily involves deliberation,"<sup>14</sup> however, it is possible, and common to act without deliberating. The impetuous person is not acting *against* reason, but instead, *fails to reason* altogether. These are moments in which one is in the grip of an intense emotion, and thus is blinded from the rational path of action. I argue that this failure is due to the pull of the non-rational emotions impeding the agent's knowledge of the good so that it does not operate as it should, and does not translate into action for the good.

Some commonly referred to emotions that can cause one to act against one's values have been identified as those of anger, envy, jealousy, frustration, and despair. These *typically* negative emotions specifically can cause an individual to fail to give attention to the values one holds. These emotions are again, typically, experienced after a slight, or being pained. The experience of a slight or pain gives rise to the desire to retaliate. Acting upon negative emotions *can* give rise to pleasure. The individual that has been slighted or pained finds the notion of retaliation fair, justified, and attractive, for the situation makes such an action appear to be good, although it is known to be bad in one's general knowledge. In her study of Plato's Division of the Soul, Jessica Moss explains:

Anger, (*thumos*) is accompanied by a certain pleasure, for this reason first [i.e. because the angry person believes she will take revenge], and also because men dwell upon the thought of revenge, and the appearance (*phantasia*) that rises before us produces the same pleasure as one sees in dreams. (Rhetoric 1378b 2-3 ) Dwelling in the thought of

---

<sup>14</sup> Tappolet, Christine (2003).

revenge gives rise to a phantasia that enhances the attractiveness of revenge.<sup>15</sup>

While retaliation is not a virtuous course of action in most cases, understanding the emotion behind the action sheds light on the reason for which the action occurred. To reiterate, understanding the cause is not allowing an excuse: explanations lead to reformations. Understanding that one's strong emotional experience has caused one to act against one's values, makes it clear that a better understanding, and way of handling emotions is important in avoiding non-virtuous, or vice-ridden acts such as those of *akrasia*.<sup>16</sup>

These strong emotional experiences make one course of action – that is, the one that satisfies the emotion at hand – the most attractive, or in more extreme cases, the only recognizable option in the situation. There are times at which one's emotional pull is so strong, that the individual fails to recognize that the situation calls for a moral decision, or any decision at all. The *impetuous akratic* thinking only of the pleasure that would arise from acting on these emotions, immediately and blindly follows this mistakenly apprehended pleasure. The appraisal of the pleasure does not include all of the relevant information the situation involves. As Christine Tappolet in her *Emotions and the Intelligibility in Akratic Actions* observes, “the judgment only takes into account a limited number of reasons. – due to the emotions.”<sup>17</sup> The emotion causes one to skip the

---

<sup>15</sup> Moss, Jessica (2008). “Appearances and Calculations: Plato's Division of the Soul”

<sup>16</sup> “Feeling distress and repentance indicates that one's emotions were in fact properly regulated by one's practical reasoning, even though one's behavior was not. Hence, feeling distress and repentance provides positive evidence that one was not *wicked* or *evil*, but rather, unthinking due to the non-rational pull of the emotions.”  
Murray, Dylan. (2014)

<sup>17</sup> Tappolet, Christine (2003).

deliberation process entirely, and abandon the ability to reason.<sup>18</sup> According to Tappolet, “[I]t seems quite false to suppose that the akratic agent judges it better to preform the action she actually performs. If we asked her, she would certainly deny that she judges it a better course of action.”<sup>19</sup>

\*\*\*

During investigation after the incident, it was found that both were struggling with the distance, and that both recognized their relationship was not perfect, but there were no clues that it would end the way it did. They had a loving normal relationship. It is my intuition that Clayton experienced the same phenomena exhibited in the Milgram experiment, although his situation was different in that no one was telling him to continue. Alex and Clayton had been fighting all night, and, upon return to Alex’s dorm, the argument became physical: Alex began pushing Clayton. Clayton, angered by this form of humiliation, began pushing and punching back. Similar to the participants recognizing the *learner* was suffering tremendous pain - Clayton recognized Alex’s breathing was labored. Rational decision-making requires both making the correct

---

<sup>18</sup> “Mental states on the pre-deliberative level may be conscious, but its processing is wholly receptive; one is not active with respect to it. In contrast, one can actively engage with information at the next, deliberative level, where it enters into (or initiates) rational relations with one’s other mental states... such that one comes to practical conclusions: judgments about what to do. At the next, post-deliberative level, the information can then influence one’s decision, and so, at the highest level, one’s overt behavior.

Emotions can interfere at any one of the levels—either by preventing information from reaching the next altogether, or by distorting it in some other way—resulting in a failure or disruption regarding that information *at that level*. [Goldie, Peter. (2000).]

One’s passions may motivate a particular action at a pre-deliberative level and ensure that it, rather than any alternative action, will be performed, by disrupting the recognition that there are any alternative courses of action—i.e., by disrupting appreciation of the fact that one could, or has the ability to, do anything else.

Goldie, Peter (2000).

<sup>19</sup> Stroud, S., Tappolet, C (2003).

## *Akrasia* and Domestic Violence

decision, but before that is possible, the agent must recognize all available options for action. Being clouded by his anger and surprise at the extent to which he hurt Alex, Clayton did not see stopping and seeking help as a viable option. He claims that he, “didn’t want the girl [he] loved to suffer,” as his deciding factor in delivering that final blow. He was so enraged by their fight, that, although he began to see reality for what it was, not merely what he was feeling, and that he was hurting Alex, he was unable to come up with an alternative, potentially *better* course of action to really help “the one he loved”

\*\*\*

There is no profile to identify an *akratic* abuser with; there is no such thing as a *typical abuser*, at all. The only thing abusers of Intimate Partner Violence have in common is the overarching theme of abuse itself. The *akratic* abuser differs from a chronic abuser in that the perpetrator is *typically* a rational, non-abusing partner, but in the face of extreme emotions, becomes an *akratic abuser*. This is the unfortunate, unsatisfying truth of instances of *impetuous akrasia*, and the reason why gaining and maintaining control over one’s own emotions is pressing. As social beings, many interactions are heavily influenced by the emotions. One cannot deliberately control one’s passions in light of particular information about one’s situation if one’s deliberative processes never engage with it. Noticing and acknowledging the signs of an abusive relationship is the first step to ending it. A more optimistic goal, however, is to prevent the *impetuous* abuser from committing the *akratic* act in the first place through a better understanding of controlling one’s emotions, a notion that has been introduced simultaneously with the notion of *akrasia*, and continues to be developed today.

## *Akrasia* and Domestic Violence

It is clear that control over the emotions is important in developing a moral character, and avoiding instances of atrocities such as domestic violence. In most cases of a one-time abuser, and some cases of a repeated abuser, it appears as though the violent action could have been resisted if one were able to *take a step back*, to *see the bigger picture*, and realize violence, and harming others is far from the right thing to do. “For even if emotions, like judgments and desires, are not directly subject to the will, it is nonetheless true that one is often able to take the steps necessary to resist them.”<sup>20</sup> Often, emotions and emotional responses are learned. As a child, one may be fearful of more things, for one does not yet *know* that certain things that may appear dangerous are safe. The same is true for the opposite; a child that has been brought up in a very safe environment, with little worry about danger, may be extremely courageous – the child does not believe standing near the crumbly cliffs edge is dangerous. This is what brings us to the idea of emotional appropriateness, which is also a learned concept. If a child is taught that snakes are dangerous, the child will feel fear when in the presence of a snake, and likely will attempt to get as far away as possible from the snake. As an example:

A believes that the snake is dangerous; A desires to stay away from the snake, therefore, A will feel fear towards snake, and run away. If the emotion or emotional response is found inappropriate, the individual ought to work at rationalizing the emotion to an appropriate response.

With a deeper understanding and knowledge in relation to the snake, and any potential danger, an individual can learn to recognize the snake as either more or less dangerous, which will then alter the individual’s emotional response to that snake. If an individual learns that garden snakes are harmless, one ought to recognize that intense fear is not

---

<sup>20</sup> Stroud, S., & Tappolet, C. (2003).

necessary.<sup>21</sup> It is important that one's *recognition-response system* is proportional and appropriate to ensure one makes the best possible decisions in regards to action.

The rational part of the soul ought to have the ability to influence the non-rational-emotion-producing part, for it is concerned with what is truly good and truly bad, whereas the emotions arise in relation to how things appear. Moss has described the "thoughts" of the rational part to be such as: "Doing this tempting but unjust act is bad," "Making this painful but noble sacrifice is good."<sup>22</sup> The non-rational part of the soul must be guided by the rational part so that one is able to learn proportionality and appropriateness. This notion fits perfectly well with Aristotle's theory of the *impetuous akratic*, as well as my take on the *angered impetuous akratic*, for Aristotle, probably more than any other philosopher, emphasizes that becoming virtuous is a life-long process of education, training, habituation and realization of the noble and the good. "The virtuous agent is characterised by having the right reason, in accordance with the right desire, so that his practical deliberations flow smoothly into the right action."<sup>23</sup>

Aristotle and his mentor, Plato, are not the only ancient philosophers to suggest the possibility of the rational part of the soul gaining influence over the non-rational, emotional part. Descartes, in his *The Passions of the Soul*, has also assented to the notion that one can "train the passions in determinate ways and in this manner acquire absolute mastery over them," as a way to overcome *akrasia*. Emotions are in principle contrary

---

<sup>21</sup> Some fears and other emotional responses to stimuli are so deeply rooted in an individual's belief system; the individual will be unable to shed the fear experienced with a small fact, these, however, are phobias, and the like are not what I have in mind here – but rather, instances of inappropriate/disproportional beliefs

<sup>22</sup> Moss, Jessica (2008). *Appearances and Calculations: Plato's Division of the Soul* (p27).

<sup>23</sup> Athanassoulis, Nafsika. *Getting it Wrong: Akrasia and the Emotions*. Phil Papers.

but open to the direction of reason: a process that will be described in detail in the next chapter.

**Chapter Three: Akrasia and Ending Domestic Violence**

*“Do not look back and grieve over the past, for it is gone;  
and do not be troubled by the future, for it has yet to come.*

*Live in the present, and make it so beautiful that it will be worth remembering.”*

~Ida Scott Taylor

One is not responsible for one’s emotions in the same way that one is responsible for one’s actions. One is, however, responsible for one’s emotional capacity; one must attempt to have the rational part *rule* the soul. The emotions are a function of the non-rational soul, and thus are the product of perception, which does not involve calculation. This can become problematic, for as I have asserted, emotions are often the root of action, and therefore one must be wary of the emotions one acts upon. As I have established, only calculation – a function of the rational soul – can determine what is truly good or bad, so calculation *must* influence the non-rational soul in order for one to reach *eudaimonia*. In a situation in which an individual perceives to have been wronged, that individual will experience conflicting desires of a few varieties. The non-rational spirited part of the soul, seeking to avenge one’s honor, will desire retaliation; the non-rational appetitive part will desire the pleasure that follows from revenge, while the rational part of the soul will desire to follow calm reason and discuss the issues one has with another. Now that it is clear one will *win*, it must be determined how one can ensure the rational part of the soul will win so that the individual will avoid lashing out, and attain virtue and *eudaimonia*.

Plato, Aristotle, and philosophers since have provided or alluded to ways in which one can keep the non-rational desires under rational control. Some scholars argue that these theories are hypothesis confirming, such that the theorists have made pieces of moral psychology fit the theory rather than have a theory that fits moral psychology. The

theories Plato has provided through his works have been viewed as insufficient because they are centered on metaphors which include a painter in the liver, the bottom of the non-rational soul, a scribe in the rational soul, and the influence of an education of the arts: music and poetry. With the proper *communication* between the scribe and the painter; rational and non-rational, the soul can learn what is worthy and honorable. Aristotle claims that the virtuous person is one who's non-rational soul is able and willing to listen to reason from the rational soul, and that with training, it can learn to listen to and speak with reason (NE 1.13). To borrow Jonathan Lear's defense of Aristotle, "[t]o a contemporary English speaker, [this] phrase...may [seem] to leave out the active living person ... But, for Aristotle, the courageous person acting courageously is precisely an instance of the non-rational soul listening better and more willingly to ...reason."<sup>24</sup> It is not that the emotions ought to be avoided altogether, but that one ought to be cautious of one's emotions interfering with one's decision making.

The ability of the rational soul to communicate with the non-rational soul is the result of ethical virtue. (NE 1103a3-10). The way one's non-rational soul can become more apt to live according to the reason of the rational soul is through general education of politics, policy, and the arts, for the non-rational soul has its own nature, such that of simple beauty. In portraying the non-rational soul as childish, training it to *listen to* reason is similar to the teachings of a father, guiding his child to maturity: reason. The excellent child is excellent at attending to his parent's communication; the excellent parent is excellent not only in knowing what to say, but in how to communicate it to a child. After analyzing Aristotle, Jonathon Lear has concluded, "[t]he non-rational soul has

---

<sup>24</sup> Lear, Jonathan (2013).

a distinctive form of activity, but that activity is nevertheless communicative: it listens and it speaks.”<sup>25</sup> Unfortunately, this is the extent to which Aristotle offers an explanation as to how such a communicative relationship could exist, however, we can turn to the works of Plato, as well as other modern psychologies and psychoanalysis to piece together the incomplete bits, to understand how the non-rational soul can communicate with the rational.

Analyzing Plato’s theories in conjunction with those of Aristotle and modern psychologies, one can find a valid, logical theory in which one can gain and maintain control over one’s non-rational desires. Virtue involves a life-long process of education, training, and understanding of the *good*, and in doing so, one can overcome the pull of the emotions, and thus, will to part from *akratic* tendencies. Virtuous agents have the settled disposition to behave in noble ways; they are no longer moved by non-rational desires and emotions, and will not engage in *akratic* actions, such as those involved in domestic violence. Importance is embedded in the awareness of and reflective thought about one’s feelings and emotions.

In conjunction with his discussion of the tripartite soul, Plato has offered discussions on the ability of the rational part of the soul to communicate with, and thus, influence the non-rational parts of the soul. As I have described in chapter two, the rational and non-rational parts, according to Plato, *speak different languages*; the rational part, infused with cognition, communicates through *logoi*, [words] while the non-rational

---

<sup>25</sup> Lear, Jonathan (2013).

parts respond to images. The lower, non-rational parts of the soul do not reason about things but simply *go with* how things appear, *how things strike it*. Due to this *language barrier*, the rational part of the soul cannot directly reason with the non-rational parts as to why some passions ought to be pursued while others are avoided, which happens in different, but similar ways throughout Plato's works.

In the *Philebus*, Plato discusses the metaphor of two craftsmen working within the non-rational and rational parts that are able to communicate the happenings of each part respectively. The rational part of the soul that speaks with words has a scribe that "write[s] down words in the soul," based on what has been perceived. The *logoi* that lead to passions must be accompanied by images, because being a function of the non-rational part of the soul, the passions arise from imagination rather than abstract reasoning. After the scribe writes what has been judged, the existence of another craftsman, a painter, provides pictures of the words that have been written, which are then the source of passions. "When a man, besides receiving from sight or some other sense certain opinions or statements, sees in his mind the images of the subjects of them;-is not this a very common mental phenomenon?" (39b).

As I have discussed in chapter two, the rational part of the soul, the part that "communicates through *logoi*," and "reasons and deliberates" is like a book in that it remembers how it has steered the body in the past to mitigate pain and seek pleasure after having *written* down the results of said actions. This system needs another craftsman, "[t]he painter, who, after the scribe has done his work, draws images in the soul of the

things which he has described,” (39b) so that the non-rational part can decipher what messages the rational part is sending.

The process of *translating* from rational to non-rational thought and action becomes clearer in the *Timeous*. The *Timeaous* discusses the creation of the entire human soul by God, such that it is comprised of a mortal part - the body and bodily desires, and an immortal part – the rational part of the soul. God made “the soul... prior to and older than the body, to be the ruler and mistress, of whom the body was to be the subject.” The non-rational, mortal body lives once, follows its passions, “is led away by visions night and day,” and thus needs an immortal part that lives through many lives learning the way to *eudaimonia*. The non-rational body must then have a physical feature that is affected by the rational soul, to convey those messages to the body. Plato claims this to be the liver; it receives the thoughts of the rational part of the soul and are reflected to the non-rational part as images that can appear to the non-rational parts of the soul as consequences, threats, commands, or rewards (71a-d). The liver is able to cause pain and unpleasantness to deter the body from pursuing desires through diffusing bitter bile causing pain and loathing toward the non-rational, immoral desire. This is how the mortal body knows, *doing this unjust but pleasant thing is bad,*” such as becoming nauseous while planning to steal the hard-earnings from a loved one. The same is true of the opposite, that is, “by making use of the natural sweetness of the liver,” it can correct for all things making them to be “right and smooth...happy and joyful.”<sup>26</sup> The non-rational

---

<sup>26</sup> bright and sweet, and should also have a bitter quality, in order that the power of thought, which proceeds from the mind, might be reflected as in a mirror which receives likenesses of objects and gives back images of them to the sight ; and so might strike

passions are always molded on rational beliefs. In the *Timeaus*, passions are copies of reason's thoughts, while in the *Philebus*, passions are copies of the scribe's *logoi*.

Plato discusses the use of poetry and musical education in the *Republic* to influence both the appetite and spirit, which can harmonize spirit with reason (411e). With the proper implementation of poetry and music, the soul can learn what is worthy and honorable, and therefore learn to exist in harmony with itself. Musical education seems to concern itself directly with the non-rational passions as it also has within it the force to resist *attacks* of pleasure, pain, fear, and desire. Resisting music, and musical education on the other hand seems to create the inability to manage these experiences. (548b4-c2). Music's calculable rhythmic aspect likely has something to do with its ability to suppress desires, for rational thoughts are based on calculable aspects, which can be learned through music.

It is important to train the non-rational soul to "listen better" to the rational so that the emotions and emotional responses are of an appropriate essence and magnitude. One's emotional responses must be of an appropriate essence and magnitude to be wholly

---

terror into the desires, when, making use of the bitter part of the liver, to which it is akin, it comes threatening and invading, and diffusing this bitter element swiftly through the whole liver produces colours like bile, and contracting every part makes it wrinkled and rough ; and twisting out of its right place and contorting the lobe and closing and shutting up the vessels and gates, causes pain and loathing.

And the converse happens when some gentle inspiration of the understanding pictures images of an opposite character, and allays the bile and bitterness by refusing to stir or touch the nature opposed to itself, but by making use of the natural sweetness of the liver, corrects all things and makes them to be right and smooth and free, and renders the portion of the soul which resides about the liver happy and joyful, enabling it to pass the night in peace, and to practise divination in sleep, inasmuch as it has no share in mind and reason.

Plato. *Timeaus*.

## *Akrasia* and Domestic Violence

virtuous. These responses are learned either through experience or lesson, and become habituated. Emotional responses can be taught, molded, and changed. Although this system, the recognition-response system develops through the individual's life, it is worrisome for it does not include a reflection period to determine whether one's responses are appropriate or not.

Example: A child watches the movie *Anaconda*, which is about a giant snake that the characters are constantly running from, and develops an intense fear of snakes. Whenever the individual sees even just a photo of a snake, he runs and screams in fear. While on a hike with his wife one day many years later, she slipped off the edge barely holding on. As he started towards her, he saw two large snakes near where she was.

- a) He was immediately paralyzed: he had feared snakes his whole life, but the life of his loved one was in danger. He knew the rational and right thing to do was to save his wife but, being unable to resist the urge to run away, he ran looking for help.
- b) He immediately ran to her completely disregarding the snakes. He had learned about snakes in one of his classes growing up, and knew which snakes were fatal, and which were harmless.

With education, one can recognize things differently, in this case, less dangerous than originally perceived, which can then cause a shift in one's emotional response. Intelligence, a function of the rational part of the soul can help mitigate the effects the emotions may have on one's decision-making skills.

Some philosophers such as Jonathon Lear have linked Aristotle's theories to those of psychoanalytic roots. Lear draws a parallel between Freud's unconscious and Aristotle's non-rational such that "[i]t makes sense to think of Freudian unconscious as 'another nature of the soul' in the Aristotle's sense... In this sense, Freud's discovery is an

enrichment of that original Aristotelian intuition.”(6). Freud’s point is not about believing in contradictions, it is about the productions of the unconscious being unopposed by rational considerations to the contrary.<sup>27</sup> One must be made aware, potentially through therapeutic sessions, of all factors that lead to a decision as to how to act or be. Bringing unconscious desires to the forefront of one’s mind as the ultimate goal of psychoanalysis makes it clear that such a practice can facilitate the communication between the non-rational and rational parts of the soul. “[B]y 1912 [Freud] had explicitly formulated what he called the fundamental rule of psychoanalysis: namely, that the analysand should try to say whatever comes into conscious awareness without censorship or inhibition...The analysand is to try to speak his mind; the analyst is to facilitate the process.”<sup>28</sup> The non-rational soul, or the unconscious, will attempt to halt the individual from spilling the inner contents of the passions with the somatic experience of intense fatigue, stomach ache, head ache, bowel troubles, and so on: often just outside of conscious awareness: scenarios that can be understood as instances of *akrasia*. After analyzing Aristotle, Jonathon Lear has concluded, “[t]he non-rational soul has a distinctive form of activity, but that activity is nevertheless communicative: it listens and it speaks.” “Freud thought that the unconscious often speaks in corporeal terms, with bodily symptoms and corporeal representations of mental activity.”(Lear 2013). These somatic experiences can

---

<sup>28</sup> Lear, Jonathan. (2013).

be thought of as moments in which the voice of the non-rational soul speaks loud and clear, to which the rational part of the soul can respond.

Non-proportional amounts of the emotional response of fear to a situation is certainly not a moral issue, but the same line of logic applies to inappropriate emotional responses that do result in immoral actions. In the Recognition-Response System, the first step is redundantly recognizing the emotional stimulant. When it comes to Domestic Violence, this emotional stimulant is often the perception of being slighted. People are more likely to get angry and aggress if they feel as though their social status has been challenged. In the event of a slight, the individual slighting the other puts the one being slighted in an inferior position in that moment. If one feels oneself to be superior to the slighter, the slighted will likely feel anger and desire retaliation to confirm one's superiority.

Our rationality and thus our freedom consists in our ability to step back in reflection and consider whether the evidence before us gives us a reason to believe, or whether in the face of a certain desire we have a reason to act. Unfortunately, without reflection one may never come to the realization that one's emotional responses, and thus one's actions out of emotions ought to be altered. In the instance of an abuser, the perpetrator ought to recognize immediately that abusing is wrong, but if not, one must be encouraged to see a psychoanalyst to facilitate the voice of the non-rational soul, and allow the rational to hear and influence it. The rational soul must share its knowledge of the good, and how to attain the good with the non-rational part, for without the ability to

## *Akrasia* and Domestic Violence

calculate and reason, the non-rational functions of the soul will be out of control this perpetrating acts of *akrasia*.

The first step is to get abusers to recognize that their recognition response system is of an inappropriate magnitude, and that it ought to change. This is what I believe happened in my friend's case. It was not that Alex had challenged Clayton's social status, but rather, Clayton perceived the situation as diminishing his social status. Early in the tragic night, on their way to a party, the couple and a friend were pulled over by the cops and, being 19 years young at the time, Alex handed her open beer to Clayton, 21 years at the time, so that the fine would be lesser. The couple had then gone on arguing all night about the aforementioned incident as well as other "stupid stuff" as Clayton has reported. I believe he felt as though Alex was slighting him, for he claims he was "so angry that [he] just snapped," and unfortunately, that snap ended Alex's life.

Immediately upon recognizing what he had done, Clayton experienced immediate guilt and regret, as he attempted to flee the scene, he shortly later decided to turn himself in. The unfortunate truth that I still struggle to comprehend is that although he realized he had done a morally atrocious thing, it was too late. A reformation of behavior was impossible, and he will never be truly forgiven for that. It is still unfair that Alex experienced an untimely death. It is also unfair that her death was the inspiration for my research, for her death should never have been a reality. All I can do now is, in Alex's honor, help as many victims by reforming abusers from abusing, and enable victims to transition to survivors. *Akratic* abusers can learn to suppress the overwhelming desire to act upon emotion, and instead use reason to shape the way in which they think and act.

## *Akasia and Domestic Violence*

There can be a “[t]ransition from anger to constructive thinking about future good.”<sup>29</sup> While there were no signs of physical abuse prior to Alex’s untimely death to have potentially interfered with, an increase in the awareness of Domestic Violence, and how prevalent it is in today’s day and age, more victims can become survivors.

Behavior Psychologist Sarah Buel points out that, “[m]ost victims try harder to please the abuser, whether they need or love the person, they hope this renewed effort and loyalty will result in cessation of the abuse.” She also goes on to say that, “many batterers are charismatic and charming causing victims to fall in love and may have difficulty in altering their feelings with the first sign of a problem.”<sup>30</sup> More often than not, an individual does not recognize one’s own relationship as abusive, whether on the side of the victim or the abuser. Noticing and acknowledging the signs of an abusive relationship is the first step to ending it. Even though progression has been made on the topic of IPV, it still exists. People are still suffering at the hands of their abuser: these people need to be helped. Love Shouldn’t Hurt. Make Life Beautiful.

*Remember Alex.*

---

<sup>29</sup> Nussbaum, Martha C. (2015).

<sup>30</sup> Buel, Sarah M. (1999)

## Akrasia and Domestic Violence

### Works Cited:

Aristotle. *Nicomachian Ethics*.

Athanassoulis, Nafsika. *Getting it Wrong: Akrasia and the Emotions*. Phil Papers?  
philpapers.org/archive/ATHAAT

Buel, Sarah M. "Fifty Obstacles to Leaving, a.k.a Why abuse Victims Stay." *The Colorado Lawyer*. (1999)

Fieconi, E. C. (2013). Aristotle's Account of Akrasia (Unpublished master's thesis). University College London.

Goldie, Peter. *The Emotions: A Philosophical Exploration*. Oxford: Clarendon, 2000. Print.

Hastings, D. (2014, May 31). Clayton Whittemore guilty of beating to death girlfriend at SUNY Brockport. Retrieved February 15, 2016, from <http://www.nydailynews.com/news/national/clayton-whittemore-guilty-beating-death-girlfriend-suny-brockport-article-1.1812393>

Heather, N., & Segal, G. (2015). Is addiction a myth? Donald Davidson's solution to the problem of akrasia says not\*. *The International Journal Of Alcohol And Drug Research*, 4(1), 77-83. doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.7895/ijadr.v4i1.195>

Kraut, Richard, "Aristotle's Ethics", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2016 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2016/entries/aristotle-ethics/>.

Lear, Jonathon (2013). "IV-Integrating The Non-Rational Soul." *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*. 114(1) 75-101.

## *Akrasia* and Domestic Violence

Milgram, Stanley. *Obedience to Authority: An Experimental View*. New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, Inc., 1974.

Moss, Jessica (2008) "Appearances and Calculations: Plato's Division of the Soul"

*Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* 34, 2008

Murray, Dylan. (2014). "Situationism, Going Mental, and Modal Akrasia. *Philos Stud Philosophy Studies*, 172(10) 711-736.

Nussbaum, Martha C. (2015). *Transitional Anger*. *Journal of the American Philosophical Association*, 1, pp41-56 doi:10.1017/apa.2014.19

Owens, D.. (2002). Epistemic Akrasia. *The Monist*, 85(3), 381–397. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27903783>

Pettit, Philip (2003). Akrasia, collective and individual. In Christine Tappolet & Sarah Stroud (eds.), *Weakness of Will and Practical Irrationality*. Oxford: Clarendon Press 68--97.

Plato. *Philebus*.

Plato. *The Republic*.

Plato. *Laws*.

Plato. *Protagoras*.

Plato. *Timeaus*.

Pritchard, Duncan and Turri, John, (2014). "The Value of Knowledge", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2014 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2014/entries/knowledge-value/>>.

*Akrasia* and Domestic Violence

Stroud, Sarah., Tappolet, Christine (2003). Emotions and the intelligibility of akratic action. *Weakness of Will and Practical Irrationality* \_.