In *Nicomachean Ethics* 1147b9-17, Aristotle sums up his preceding discussion concerning the question of whether it is possible for a person to know what is best for him or her and to act against this knowledge (1146b31-1147b9) and points to the partial coincidence of his answer to this question with the famous but controversial opinion of Socrates, as presented earlier in 1145b21-27. The content of that summary has been considered problematic by scholars since the nineteenth century because a part of it (1147b15-17) seems inconsistent with the account of the phenomenon of acrasia as given by Aristotle earlier. No explanation of this discrepancy offered so far has generally been accepted. In what follows I will exactly explain what the difficulty consists in, I will mention the most often adopted solutions to the problem (one of which is an emendation of the text in 1147b16), and I will propose a new solution, i.e. one pointing to a straightforward interpretation of the text that does not seem to have been taken into account in the research so far. That way I hope to show that the manuscript text needs no emendation and is perfectly consistent with the traditional interpretation of Aristotle’s account of acrasia.

The text reads as follows:

ἐπεὶ δ᾿ ἡ τελευταία πρότασις δόξα τε αἰσθητοῦ καὶ κυρία τῶν πράξεων, ταύτην ἢ οὐκ ἔχει ἐν τῷ πάθει ὤν, ἢ οὕτως ἔχει ὡς οὐκ ἦν τὸ ἔχειν ἀλλὰ λέγειν ὥσπερ ὁ οἰνωμένος τὰ ᾿Εμπεδοκλέους. καὶ διὰ τὸ μὴ καθόλου μηδ᾿ ἐπιστημονικὸν ὁμοίως εἶναι δοκεῖν τῷ καθόλου τὸν ἐσχατὸν ὄρον καὶ ἐξείκεν ὃ ἐξήτει Σωκράτης συμβαίνειν· οὐ γὰρ τῆς κυρίως ἐπιστήμης εἶναι δοκοῦσις παραφύγαις γίνεται τὸ πάθος, οὐδ᾿ αὕτη περιέλκεται διὰ τὸ πάθος, ἀλλὰ τῆς αἰσθητικῆς (1147b9-17; ed. Bywater 1894).
‘Now, the last premiss being an opinion about a perceptible object, and being also what determines our actions, this a man either has not when he is in the state of passion, or has it in the sense in which having knowledge did not mean knowing but only talking, as a drunken man may mutter the verses of Empedocles. And because the last term is not universal nor equally an object of scientific knowledge with the universal term, the position that Socrates sought to establish actually seems to result; for it is not in the presence of what is thought to be knowledge proper that the passion occurs (nor is it this that is ‘dragged about’ as a result of the passion), but in that of perceptual knowledge’ (trans. Ross, in: Ross and Brown 2009).

On the traditional interpretation (which I will adopt here), ‘the last premiss’ (ἡ τελευταία πρότασις) mentioned in 1147b9 is the (last) minor premiss of the practical syllogism (‘This is such-and-such,’ where the major premiss would be, e.g. ‘One should not taste anything that is such-and-such’), and ‘the last term’ (ὁ ἔσχατος ὁρος) from 1147b14 is the minor term in the minor premiss (‘This’). Thus, the text states that the knowledge contained in the minor premiss, concerning the particular and object of sensation, is not universal and scientific, whereas the one contained in the major premiss is. On the basis of the preceding discussion concerning the mode of ignorance (ἀγνοια) of the akratic (1146b31-1147a24), Aristotle now states that it is precisely the minor premiss that is either not possessed or merely verbally possessed by a man at the moment of the incontinent action (ἐν τῷ πάθει ὤν). It is clear, then, where he can see the agreement between the result of his own analysis and the position of Socrates, according to whom ‘it would be strange . . . if when knowledge was in a man (ἐπιστήμης ἐνούσης) something else could master (κρατεῖν) it and drag it about like a slave (περιέλκειν αὐτὴν ὥσπερ ἀνδράποδον)’ (1145b23-24; trans. Ross). The congruence takes place because for Aristotle also, genuine knowledge, i.e. the general knowledge contained in the major premiss, is not suspended through the passion at the moment of the incontinent action.

However, Aristotle’s justification for the thesis on conformity of his position with the Socratic view, as given in the sentence οὐ γὰρ τῆς κυρίως ἐπιστήμης εἶναι δοκούσης παροῦση γίνεται τὸ πάθος . . ., ἀλλὰ τῆς αἰσθητικῆς (1147b15-17), seems to be different. This statement, understood by almost all scholars as in

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1 For a criticism of the alternative interpretation taking the ἡ τελευταία πρότασις as designating the conclusion of the practical syllogism, see Hardie 1980, 287; Price 1995, 195, n. 33; Bostock 2000, 131-132; Destrée 2007, 146-147. The interpretation ὁ ἔσχατος ὁρος as the minor premiss (e.g. Price 1995, 132) does not interfere with the interpretation of the passage presented here.