

SYNDERESIS AND CONSCIENCE: STOICISM AND ITS MEDIEVAL TRANSFORMATIONS

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Author argues that the conscience is a theme frequently flagged as a key aspect of Stoicism. Beyond mere consciousness, our self-awareness as agents, moral and otherwise, conscience specifies the ethical norms we honor in judging our experience and acting on it. Scholars have studied how the Stoics think we acquire these norms, how we apply them in concrete individual cases, and how we estimate this practice, prospectively or retrospectively, examining our conscience and steeling ourselves to the difficulties of acting in its light. Whether these processes depend on Ancient Stoic monopsychism – the notion that the soul has no subdivisions or infrarational faculties – has also drawn attention. In tracking its medieval fortunes, whether in Stoic or modified form, we will note as well some of the related ideas with which this doctrine traveled.

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Individual Stoics were not equally interested in the psychodynamics of self-knowledge and they were far from consistent or systematic when they addressed it, a lack of consensus duly reflected by modern commentators. Patristic and medieval authors were also selective. If, with Tertullian's *Seneca saepe noster* and Dante's *Seneca morale*, they sometimes named names, they also absorbed many Stoic doctrines indirectly, without identity-tags. If they processed Stoicism through a biblical template, they also processed the Bible through a philosophical template. The traffic was a two-way street. If and when traffic signs were posted, they were not always heeded or enforced. Some doctrines taught by the Stoics, among others, retained their vigor and identity across the post-classical divide. The Delphic injunction, "Know thyself," is a salient example¹. Also notable in this regard are right reason or natural law as a source of universally accessible moral norms, casuistic considerations in applying them, and intentionality as the essence of the moral act. All were invoked as criteria in self-examination, in classical Latin authors who were not professed Stoics, and in patristic and medieval authors².

If some Stoic notions survived more or less intact, others, like oxygen, remained inert unless combined with other elements, philosophical or theological. Critical here is St. Paul on conscience. While the Apostle defends a natural moral law whose accessibility is part of our general human endowment, he regards it as innate, inscribed on the fleshy tablets of the heart. Other biblical authors

¹ Pierre Courcelle, *Connais-toi toi-même de Socrate à saint Bernard*, 3 vols. (Paris: Études Augustiniennes, 1974–75).

² Marcia L. Colish *The Stoic Tradition from Antiquity to the Early Middle Ages*, 2nd ed. (Leiden: Brill, 1990), 1:95–104, 136–43, 147–48, 170–71, 173, 178, 198, 209–12, 252–75, 283–89, 298–99, 302–3, 337; 2:26–33, 34, 26, 38–47, 51–54, 57, 61–62, 65–66, 68–70, 75–79, 86–87, 113–14, 117–18, 125, 127–28, 206–11, 221–25, 236, 247, 260–61, 282–90, 299–301; Robert Blomme, *La doctrine du péché dans les écoles théologiques de la première moitié du XII siècle* (Louvain: Publications Universitaires de Louvain, 1958); Philippe Delhaye, *Christian Conscience*, trans. Charles Underhill Quinn (New York: Desclée, 1968), 24–25, 50; Gerard Verbeke, *The Presence of Stoicism in Medieval Thought* (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 1983), 1–21, 67.

also locate ethical values in the heart. Like Paul, they often lament the ways we besmirch our heart, and seek its purification. They agree that the recovery of a clean heart requires divine aid as well as human effort, and obedience not only to natural law but also to a divine law that may or may not coincide with it. Finally, while St. Paul acknowledges the possibility of good conscience, for him the examination of conscience typically exposes our shortcomings, often reflecting the strife between flesh and spirit. The basic function of this exercise is to alert us to our sins, inspiring remorse and the wish to repent and do better. In these respects, St. Paul and other biblical authors reinforce some aspects of Stoicism on conscience while offering a striking alternative to it³.

The Stoics themselves present a range of menu options on how we acquire basic moral norms. Choices include empirical evidence; innate, self-evident, or intuited first principles; seminal reasons implanted at birth that become rational norms as we mature, whether more or less automatically, under the guidance of a tutelary *daimon* metaphorical or otherwise, or the teaching

³ Delhaye, *Conscience*, 42-49, 64-99. Both Delhaye, 50 and Verbeke, *Presence of Stoicism*, 67 n. 97, see a carryover of the idea of conscience from Stoicism to Christianity and review the literature to date of their publications on that question. For the survival of the heart as the locus of both sin and contrition for sin in the Middle Ages see Silvana Vecchio, "Peccatum cordis," in *Il cuore = Micrologus* 11 (2003): 325-42. The issue of the possible influence of Stoicism on St. Paul has generated a lengthy and debated historiography, dominated by confessional, political, and disciplinary agendas. For background on this topic, see Marcia L. Colish, "Stoicism and the New Testament: An Essay in Historiography," in *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt*, ed. Wolfgang Haase and Hildegard Temporini (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1992), II/26/1:334-79. A more recent study that argues for Paul's use of Stoicism and that brings the literature of this debate up through the 1990s is Troels Engberg-Pedersen, *Paul and the Stoics* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark Ltd., 2000), 1-31. The apocryphal fourth-century correspondence between Seneca and St. Paul, while known and sometimes accepted in the Middle Ages, had no influence on the topics with which this paper is concerned. On the fortunes of that text, see Gilles Meersseman, "Seneca maestro di spiritualità nei apocrifi dal XII al XV secolo," *Italia medioevale e umanistica* 16 (1976): 43-135.

and example of the wise; conclusions derived from experience; analogical reasoning; or some assortment of the above. Scholars assign different weights to these possibilities, including alternatives found within individual Stoic authors.⁴

⁴ On moral norms derived from sense data albeit with a momentary lapse into innatism in Chrysippus, followed by Epictetus, many scholars have followed F. H. Sandbach, "Ennoia and Prolêpsis in the Stoic Theory of Knowledge," in *Problems in Stoicism*, ed. Anthony A. Long (London: Athlone Press, 1971 [first pub. 1930]), 44-51, at 28-30. On Chrysippean empiricism, see Josiah B. Gould, *The Philosophy of Chrysippus* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1970), 62-64, 167, although he states, at 170, "Any assertions concerning the origin of moral goodness--or genuine knowledge about good things and bad things--can but conjecture." This warning has rarely been observed. Among those convinced that Stoic empiricism rules out innatism, self-evidence, or a *priorism* of any kind, see André-Jean Voelke, *L'Idée de la volonté dans le Stoïcisme* (Paris: PUF, 1973), 43; he also regards the *eupatheiai* as a point of transition from *oikeiosis* to mature rational *apatheiai*, at 61-65. Matt Jackson-McCabe, "The Stoic Theory of Implanted Preconceptions," *Phronesis* 44 (2004): 323-47, sees Chrysippus on implanted moral principles as expressing a standard, not an aberrant, view, reprised by Seneca and Epictetus; but he also describes them as seminal reasons brought to fruition by analogical reasoning and as not incompatible with a *tabula rasa* epistemology in other respects. Brad Inwood, *Reading Seneca: Stoic Philosophy at Rome* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005), 270-301, reasserts empiricism as the fundamental Stoic position yet argues for seminal reasons as implanting moral principles developed via sense experience, moral examples, and analogous reasoning. For Christopher Gill, *The Structured Self in Hellenistic and Roman Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 132-33, 146-50, 157-62, 164-65, 181, what is innate is a universal aptitude for developing moral principles, which occurs through our complex processing of experience, teaching, and example. He includes here Epictetus, at 159-60, as vs. Anthony A. Long, *Epictetus: A Stoic and Socratic Guide to Life* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002), 81-82, 101-2, 113-16, who gives the strongest defense to date for fully formed innate moral norms in Epictetus; from this perspective the development of a mature moral sense is a non-event. At the same time, Long's stress on the need to read Epictetus' ethics in the light of his theology, at 142-72, 180, 186-88, makes his "spark of the divine" view of the human soul more than a metaphor for natural human reason, seeing a tutelary divine presence supervising our moral choices as tantamount to conscience, at 186-87. Equally, however, Long argues,

One idea all Stoics unite in opposing is Aristotle's explanation of how we act against the principles we hold to be right. The *locus classicus* for this theory, called *akrasia*, is *Nicomachean Ethics* Book 7. Aristotle sees *akrasia* as an aberration in the behavior of a habitually virtuous person whose grasp of correct moral first principles is not in doubt. Drawing on Plato's view that our souls are tripartite, possessing spirit and passion as well as intellect, Aristotle sees *akrasia* as a temporary disconnect between our intellect, the seat of our moral norms, and either of our other two mental faculties. We are momentarily sidetracked. The result is a physical reaction that overwhelms us. It interferes with our ability to receive and to process sense data accurately, and to draw correct conclusions when we apply our moral principles to concrete cases. Thus, we act wrongly or fail to act rightly. Once we realize that this is the case, we experience regret. Aristotle then discusses how akratic behaviors can be corrected, and how our normal cognitive functions, and hence our normal decision-making activity, can be restored. Many of his medieval and modern commentators tend to read Aristotle's *akrasia* less as a somatic disturbance than as a problem in falla-

at 219-21, 225-27, that self-esteem governs our resistance to vicious choices for Epictetus, and that he also equates innate self-respect with conscience, thinking that instruction is needed only in the application of principles to concrete cases. On self-respect, Long follows Rachana Kamtekar, "ΑΙΔΩΣ in Epictetus," *Classical Philology* 93 (1998): 136-60, including the idea that it functions as a monitory "god within;" she sees it as a natural capacity that can be strengthened or weakened by habituation, but declines to define it either as a seminal reason or as a full-fledged norm at our birth. Agreeing on the tutelary "god within" or fragment of the deity in the human *daimon* as a function of conscience in Epictetus, Robert F. Dobbin, commentary on his trans. of Epictetus, *Discourses*, Book 1 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 117-18, 188-92, 206, splits the difference among moral norms as innate ideas, as seminal reasons, and as derived from education. Marcus Aurelius is usually omitted from this debate, with good reason. As R. B. Rutherford, *The Meditations of Marcus Aurelius* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), 234, 237-39, 244, observes, Marcus is all over the map in citing the sources of his own moral norms, excluding only standard *exempla virtutis* such as Socrates and Cato in preference for members of his own family; he is extremely vague on the nature of his *daimon*. The debate continues.

cious reasoning. But the Stoics, rejecting the tripartite soul and the mind-body problem as such, were the leading critics of Aristotle's doctrine of *akrasia*. They offered their own teaching on conscience as an alternative to it.⁵

Modern commentators on the Stoic doctrine of conscience emphasize the Roman Stoics, and with good reason. The single most important Roman Stoic on conscience is Seneca.⁶ This is not because he had a systematic theory, despite some scholarly efforts to provide him with one. Seneca was more accessible to post-classical European thinkers than the other Roman Stoics, and not only because he was the only one of them to write in Latin. Like most of them, and unlike Marcus Aurelius, he was a man who lived under authority, not a *divus princeps* limited only by the burdens and hazards of imperial office. Unlike Epictetus and his master Musonius Rufus, Seneca was

⁵ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 7.1-14, ed. and trans. Roger Crisp (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 119-42. For recent discussions of this doctrine, see Norman O. Dahl, "Aristotle on Action, Practical Reason, and Weakness of Will," in *A Companion to Aristotle*, ed. Georgios Anagnostopoulos (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 498-511. For the Stoic critique, see Barbara Guckes, "Akrasia in die älteren Stoa," in *Zur Ethik der älteren Stoa*, ed. Barbara Guckes (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2004), 94-122, refuting Richard Joyce, "Early Stoicism and Akrasia," *Phronesis* 40 (1995): 315-35. For recent scholarship surveying these debates in antiquity and the Middle Ages, see the contributors to *Das Problem der Willensschwäche in der mittelalterlichen Philosophie*, ed. Tobias Hoffmann, Jörn Müller, and Matthias Perkams (Leuven: Peeters, 2006); to *Akrasia in Greek Philosophy from Socrates to Plotinus*, ed. Christopher Bobonich and Pierre Destrée (Leiden: Brill, 2007); and to *Weakness of Will from Plato to the Present*, ed. Tobias Hoffmann (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 2008). Most recently, see the extensive overview and analysis by Jörn Müller, *Willensschwäche in Antike und Mittelalter: Eine Problemgeschichte von Sokrates bis Johannes Duns Scotus* (Leuven: Peeters, 2009); he supports Guckes on the Stoic critique of *akrasia* at 155-93 but views the medieval treatments of this topic before the reception of Aristotle as conditioned largely by the doctrine of original sin.

⁶ Marcia L. Colish, "Seneca on Acting against Conscience," in *Seneca Philosophus*, ed. Julia Wildberger and Marcia L. Colish (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter), forthcoming.

a moderate, not an ethical rigorist. And, while he inherited a standard Stoic syllabus on conscience, Seneca enlarged it, adding topics and terminology not found in earlier or later Stoics, yielding positions that could offer a shock of recognition to patristic and medieval Christians.

The theme to which Seneca made the most original contribution, and the theme attracting the most scholarly debate about his later influence, is Seneca on the will. I will treat him only briefly here, so as not to preempt the contribution to this conference which I am scheduled to make tomorrow. While Seneca agrees with the Stoic principle that our virtues and vices express the voluntary choices we make, based on our intellectual judgments on what is good or bad, he recognizes that our good will can be frustrated or delayed by habituation to vice. Thus, good will and bad will can occupy the same psychic space. When we realize that we are in such a state, we flagellate ourselves for acting against conscience. For when we do wrong we are well aware of the wrong we do. Seneca thus recognizes that we can act against conscience, deliberately and consciously, and observes that we inflict mental suffering on ourselves when we do so. Like other Stoics, he offers a miscellany of conditions promoting that negative state: unhealthy *tonos* (or flabby moral muscle tone, so to speak), laziness, ignorance, inattention, complacency, moral obtuseness, bad habits, the bad example of others, and the like. These claims all have the effect of pushing the question one step backward rather than answering it. This issue of the etiology of conscientious decision-making is one seized on by post-classical thinkers. Their analyses resonate with and amplify Seneca. Some of the most influential figures triggering medieval discussions of conscience are among the most, and the least, coherent on its psychodynamics. This paradox applies to the three most salient patristic figures in the sequel: Ambrose, Augustine, and Jerome.

Of these, Ambrose is the richest source for the range of patristic senses given to *conscientia*. He attaches three different meanings to this term. It can signify, simply, consciousness of our inner states, which a sage can perceive in himself and others. It can signify St. Paul's innate judge of sin. Conscience can

also be the sage's tranquil awareness of his own virtue, even in the face of external criticism and misunderstanding. One of Ambrose's most widely-read works, his *De officiis*, covers all these bases.⁷ His commentary on Psalm 118, also influential, describes--as the Psalmists do--conscience as judging our sins.⁸ On the other hand, Ambrose's treatises on the Old Testament patriarchs focus repeatedly on the good conscience of the upright. These treatises originated as sermons preparing catechumens for baptism. Hence, their upbeat character. The patriarchs are *exempla virtutis*, examples of virtue whom lay converts, as new Israelites and fellow-citizens of the saints, can actually imitate. A motivational speaker, Ambrose accents his auditors' intellectual and volitional abilities.⁹ Yet, we must note that the readership of these latter works soon shrank, given the post-classical disappearance of adult converts from Roman paganism and the growing practice of infant baptism.

In his own way, Augustine reflects both dependence on and independence from the Stoic view of conscience and its underpinnings. With Lactantius, he is alone among early Latin Christian writers in appropriating with approval their doctrine of the *hegemonikon*, the idea that the intellect is the unitary ruling principle of the human constitution, fully in control of

⁷ The *loci* in this work, illustrating the full range of applications, are collected and studied by Maurice Testard, "Observations sur le thème de la *conscientia* dans le *De officiis ministrorum* de saint Ambroise," *Revue des études latines* 51 (1973): 219-61. For Seneca's use of this term, see Pierre Grimal, "Le vocabulaire de l'interiorité dans l'oeuvre de Sénèque," in *Langue latine, langue de philosophie*, Collection de l'École française de Rome, 161 (Rome: École française de Rome, 1992), 141-59.

⁸ See Ambrose, *Exp. Ps. 118.1.9-10*, ed. Michael Petchenig, CSEL 62 (Wien: Hoelder-Pichler-Tempsky, 1913). See also *Ep. 76.17, 141.43*, ed. Michaela Zelzer, CSEL 82/3 (Wien: Hoelder-Pichler-Tempsky, 1982).

⁹ Ambrose, *De Abraham* 2.5.22, 2.6.36, ed. and trans. Franco Gori, SAEMO 2:2 (Milano: Biblioteca Ambrosiana, 1984); *De Isaac vel anima* 6.55, 8.79, ed. Karl Schenkl, trans. Claudio Moreschini, SAEMO 3 (Milano: Biblioteca Ambrosiana, 1982); *De Iacob* 1.7.28, 1.8.39, 2.3.12, ed. Karl Schenkl, trans. Roberto Palla, SAEMO 3 (Milano: Biblioteca Ambrosiana, 1982). On these works, see Marcia L. Colish, *Ambrose's Patriarchs: Ethics for the Common Man* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005).

sensation as well as of thought and volition. As an analogy of the Trinity, Augustine observes, our memory, intellect, and will are activities of a single subsistent mind. While their roles can be distinguished, they are functionally interdependent. Thus, in understanding how we make moral decisions, we cannot really speak of the priority of the intellect, or of the will, without falling into error on the co-equal Trinitarian persons in the unity of the Godhead. Among other things, this analysis alerts us to expect to find concepts such as “individual” and “person” located in the first instance in medieval discussions of Trinitarian theology and Christology. Augustine follows St. Paul on conscience as the mirror of sin and goes beyond him, in his late career, in limiting free will in any but our vicious choices. Despite its initial appeal, he ends by rejecting Stoic *apatheia*, freedom from irrational passions, and moral autarchy, as desirable or even as attainable states, redefining the norm of virtue as *caritas*, not rationality¹⁰. In line with that point, Augustine’s fabled doctrine of the divided self is ultimately neither Pauline nor Senecan. He portrays his “O Lord, make me chaste, but not yet” condition in the *Confessions* as a metaphorical attraction to two desirable women. They represent two loves, love of self and love of God and neighbor, which will remain in tension in

¹⁰ For Augustine on the *hegemonikon* and *apatheia*, see Colish, *Stoic Tradition*, 2:206-7, 2:236, 2:221-25; on the Trinitarian analogies in the human soul, see Augustine, *De trinitate* 8-14, ed. W. J. Mountain and Franciscus Glorie, CCSL 16 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1968). Medieval concepts of the individual refer literally to that which is undivided or in-divisible, be it a person, divine or human, who is a *res per se una*, or any entity not capable of internal subdivision regardless of its nature and perceived relationship with other entities possessing equivalent attributes, according to the logicians. On these points see, for the twelfth-century theological applications, especially the definition of *persona* of Gilbert of Poitiers and its influence, Marcia L. Colish, *Peter Lombard* (Leiden: Brill, 1994), 1:138-42, 1:151-54; for logical and other applications, see Susan R. Kramer and Caroline W. Bynum, “Revisiting the Twelfth-Century Individual: The Inner Self and the Christian Community,” in *Das Eigene und das Ganze: Zum Individuellen im mittelalterlichen Religion*, ed. Gert Melville and Markus Schürer (Münster: LIT, 2002), 57-85.

this life, in individuals and societies, like overlapping magnetic fields. Our best hope *in via* is to order well our loves.¹¹

The third major Latin church father on conscience is Jerome. While scarcely an intellectual heavyweight, it is yet he who brings conscience and psychology together in the problematic and highly influential text that jump-starts scholastic discussions of *synderesis* and conscience in the twelfth century. To be sure, Jerome speaks of conscience generically, and loosely, as in his commentary on the Book of Wisdom. But the key passage is in his commentary on Ezekiel, lifted most likely from Origen. This text was reprised almost verbatim in the ninth century by Rabanus Maurus and excerpted by the exegete treating Ezekiel in the twelfth-century biblical *Glossa ordinaria*. Most influentially, Jerome is quoted and the topic made canonical in Peter Lombard's *Sentences*.¹² The rest, as they say, is history, at least up through

¹¹ The *locus classicus* is Augustine, *Confessiones* 8.5-7, and 8.7 for the quotation given, ed. Lucas Verheijen, CCSL 27 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1981). On the theme of ordering charity excellent guides remain John Burnaby, *Amor Dei: A Study of the Religion of St. Augustine* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1938) and Josef Rief, *Der Ordbegriff des jungen Augustinus* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 1962). Sarah Byers, "Augustine on the 'Divided Self': Platonist or Stoic?" *Augustinian Studies* 38 (2007): 105-18 gives the palm to Stoicism but sees virtue and vice in Augustine as a matter of intellection not of will or love. She thereby reprises the position of Josef Lössl, "Intellect with a (Divine) Purpose: Augustine on the Will," in *The Will and Human Action from Antiquity to the Present*, ed. Thomas Pink and M. W. F. Stone (London: Routledge, 2004), 53-77. Richard Sorabji, "The Concept of the Will from Plato to Maximus the Confessor," in *ibid.*, 6-28 accents the will; while granting that Augustine made a significant contribution to the theme of the divided will derived from the Stoics and especially from Seneca, he sees Maximus as the thinker who fully Christianized that concept.

¹² For Jerome's generic use of conscience in the Book of Wisdom commentary, see Paul Antin, "Les idées morales de S. Jérôme," in *Recueil sur saint Jérôme* (Bruxelles: Latomus, 1968), 334. The key passage is in Jerome, *Commentariorum in Hezekielem libri XIV* 1.1.6-8a, ed. Franciscus Glorie, CCSL 75 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1964). While she does not discuss Jerome's Ezekiel commentary, Ruth Mellinkoff, *The Mark of Cain* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), 1-21, 29-31, 40-50 notes that Jewish exegetes sometimes treat Cain as repentant and sometimes do not; unlike Jerome, most of the

John Duns Scotus in the early fourteenth century, after which the language of *synderesis* and conscience drops from the scholastic agenda, to be replaced by discussion of the norm of right reason.

Jerome makes several points in his Ezekiel commentary that provide grist for the scholastic mills. Conflating Plato's three subdivisions of the soul as *logikon*, *thumikon*, and *epithumikon* with Aristotle's intellectual, irascible, and concupiscible faculties, he equates them, respectively, with the man, the lion, and the ox in the

church fathers and early Christian writers treat Cain as repentant, although such twelfth-century scholastics as Hugh of St. Victor and Peter Comestor regard him as an excommunicate condemned to eternal perdition. For what it is worth, Dante regards Cain as repentant and places him in Purgatory (*Purg.* 14.133) on the path to eventual salvation. The filiation of the key passage in Jerome's Ezekiel commentary in medieval scholastics, without attention to their biblical exegesis, is surveyed by Michael G. Baylor, *Action and Person: Conscience in Late Scholasticism* (Leiden: Brill, 1977), 25-42, 48-69, (although he omits Bonaventure, Albert the Great, and Duns Scotus); Delhaye, *Conscience*, 106-18; Odon Lottin, "Syndérèse et conscience aux XIIe et XIIIe siècles," *Psychologie et morale aux XIIe et XIIIe siècles*, 6 vols. (Louvain: Abbaye de Mont César, 1948-60), 2:103-350; Timothy Potts, *Conscience in Medieval Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980); idem, "Conscience," in *The Cambridge History of Later Medieval Philosophy from the Recovery of Aristotle to the Disintegration of Scholasticism, 1100-1600*, ed. Norman Kretzmann et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 687-704; and Verbeke, *Presence of Stoicism*, 53-70. Douglas C. Langston, *Conscience and Other Virtues from Bonaventure to Macintyre* (University Park: Penn State University Press, 2001), 8, 23-62, reprises superficially the scholastic authors considered in this paper, but merely as a curtain-raiser for modern theories. In Hoffmann, Müller, and Perkams, ed., *Das Problem der Willensschwäche*, contributors typically treat conscience and how moral agents can act against it in the context of the weakness of will theme, starting with commentaries on Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* in the mid-thirteenth century. The influence of Stoicism in the Middle Ages is not noted, as in Risto Saarinen, "Weakness of Will in the Renaissance and Reformation," in *ibid.*, 331-53 at 331, 348-49, who thinks it was a Renaissance innovation. The editors, at 17-22, hold that scholastics on conscience as studied in their volume discuss it primarily in connection with original sin. I thank Mary Sirridge for this reference. On Origen's source, see Goulven Madec, *Saint Ambroise et la philosophie* (Paris: Études Augustiniennes, 1974), 125-27 and Douglas Kries, "Origen, Plato,

prophet's vision. The fourth creature, the eagle, he identifies with two terms distinct in ancient philosophy, *synderesis* (or *synteresis*) and *conscientia*. Jerome offers no Latin translation of *synderesis*. Conflating these two terms, he defines *synderesis/conscientia* as the spark of reason (*scintilla rationis*) not extinguished in Cain, inspiring us to seek the good. This fourth mental faculty also enables us to acknowledge our sin when we fall, overcome by pleasure, fervor, or intellectual error. Like the eagle, it soars above the other faculties. It does not participate in their activities but corrects them when they go astray. There are notable problems in his account thus far. Jerome adds to them. Unlike the Cain of Genesis, his Cain does not display remorse following his sin. And, having asserted that the positive function of *synderesis/conscientia* is not extinguished, even in the worst of sinners, he observes, none the less, that we encounter people every day

and Conscience (*Synderesis*) in Jerome's Ezekiel Commentary," *Traditio* 57 (2002): 67-83, although Kries thinks that scholastic discussions began with Aquinas. John Marenbon, *The Philosophy of Peter Abelard* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 267-76, 335-36, noting the existence of the idea of conscience in Abelard, laments the fact that scholars do not give him more credit for putting the topic on the scholastic agenda. But he ignores the fact that Abelard was unaware of the Hieronymian passage that set those discussions in motion, as well as the fact that scholastics were more likely to use mainstream and accredited sources such as the *Glossa ordinaria* and the Lombard, the latter of which they could not have avoided in any case after his study was mandated by the theological faculties. For Peter Lombard on conscience, see Colish, *Peter Lombard*, 1:383. Marie-Dominique Chenu, *L'Éveil de la conscience dans la civilisation médiévale* (Montréal: Institut d'Études Médiévales, 1969), 17-32, concurs with Marenbon on Abelard, and elsewhere in this work treats conscience in twelfth-century authors generically as interiority, intentionalism, affectivity, and self-knowledge. For the monastic focus on conscience purely in relation to moral conversion and practical ethics, see Ermenegildo Bertola, *Il problema della coscienza nella teologia morale monastica del XII secolo* (Padova: CEDAM, 1970). Neither of the latter two authors notes Jerome as a source. For the shift in the meaning of *synderesis* and *scintilla animae* to signify *grunt*, or the ground of the human soul in which mystic experience occurs in Meister Eckhart, see Bernard McGinn, *The Mystical Thought of Meister Eckhart: The Man from Whom God Hid Nothing* (New York: Crossroads, 2001), 38, 40, 41 and literature cited 203-4 nn. 35, 40, 41.

who seem to have no sense whatsoever of right and wrong, and who show no compunction for their misdeeds. It is easy to see why unpacking these conflation and contradictions would give Jerome's scholastic successors much to ponder.

Starting in the twelfth century, the main context in which they did so was the psychogenesis of ethical acts. The scholastics generally agree with Jerome and Peter Lombard that the *scintilla rationis* is inextinguishable. Some, taking Jerome literally, combine him with Augustine on the *hegemonikon*, arguing that the spark of reason dwells in the highest intellectual faculty¹³. With the advance of Aristotelianism, scholastics locate the spark of reason in the practical, not the theoretical, intellect. Following this line are William of Auvergne, Bonaventure, Albert the Great, Thomas Aquinas, Parisian masters of the late thirteenth century of all persuasions, and Duns Scotus¹⁴. Other debates flourished. *Pace* Jerome, the scholastics decide that *synderesis* and conscience are not the same thing. But how are we to understand each of them—as a faculty, a *habitus* in Aristotle's sense, a power, a function, or an act? And, in the psychogenesis of ethical acts, what role does the will play, whether as the habitation of either *synderesis* or conscience, or in relation to the practical intellect?

¹³ Lottin, "Syndérèse," *Psych. et morale*, 2:106-8, 123-26, 128-34, 167-72, 187-96, 301-12, 317-19. The figures Lottin treats here are Master Udo, Simon of Bisignano, William of Auxerre, Roland of Cremona, Walter of Château-Thierry, Richard Fishacre, John of La Rochelle, Richard Rufus, and Robert Kilwardby. He notes, at 2:105-6, that the only early scholastic to reject the inextinguishability of the *scintilla rationis* is an anonymous master in the school of Laon. But Alexander of Hales indicates conditions under which *synderesis*, as the *scintilla conscientiae*, may be extinguished in *viatores*. On Alexander, see Hubert Philip Weber, "The Glossa in IV Sententiarum by Alexander of Hales," in *Mediaeval Commentaries on the Sentences of Peter Lombard*, ed. Philipp W. Rosemann (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 2:79-109 at 105-7. Langston, *Conscience*, 8, errs in claiming that conscience was not seen as a faculty in the Middle Ages. He also omits the Stoics in discussing the classical backgrounds of the doctrine of conscience.

¹⁴ Lottin, "Syndérèsis," *Psych. et morale*, 2:134-37, 203-301, 312-32; on Scotus, see Allan B. Wolter, ed. and trans., *Duns Scotus on the Will and Morality* (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 1986), 44-46, 162-66.

In the early thirteenth century, Philip the Chancellor offers a construct that many successors accept¹⁵. On whether *synderesis* is a habit or a faculty, he splits the difference, calling it a *potentia habitualis*. He locates it in the will, the affective faculty, pointing us toward the good. He also grants *synderesis* a cognitive function, although not a deliberative one: Its role is to grasp basic moral principles. And it does so intuitively, acknowledging these principles immediately, without having to think about them. For Philip, *synderesis* is infallible as well as inextinguishable. Still, the faculties it informs may disobey it. Philip also distinguishes *synderesis* from conscience, and influentially so. While *synderesis* grasps the first principles of ethics, the role of conscience is to apply these principles to the concrete ethical decisions made by the practical intellect and free will. In making those applications, however, conscience may be fallible.

In the second quarter of the century, John of La Rochelle largely seconds this position, although he locates *synderesis* in the intellect, not the will, and argues that conscience is an acquired, not an innate, *habitus*¹⁶. The followers of Alexander of Hales who authored the text called the *Summa Halensis* agree with Philip but add that, when it is understood simply as consciousness, conscience is neither a faculty nor a *habitus*. But it can be seen as the *habitus* enabling us to have that self-awareness, and as the faculty through which we experience it. In an ethical context, they regard conscience as both innate and acquired. But they also confuse matters by stating that, while *synderesis* informs conscience, conscience itself contains innate general principles in addition to applying to concrete cases those it receives from *synderesis*¹⁷.

¹⁵ Philip the Chancellor, *Summa de bono* 1. q. 4, 4. q. 2-3, ed. Nicolaus Wicki (Bern: Francke Verlag, 1985), 101-3, 192-205. The fullest account is provided by Nicolaus Wicki, *Die Philosophie Philipps der Kanzlers: Ein philosophierender Theologe des frühen 13. Jahrhunderts* (Fribourg: Academic Press, 2005), 84-114, 164. See also Lottin, "Syndérèse," *Psych. et morale*, 2:138-57. On Philip's influence, see Odon Lottin "L'Influence littéraire du Chancelier Philippe," *ibid.*, 6:155-60.

¹⁶ John of La Rochelle, *Summa de vitiis*, ed. Lottin in "Syndérèse," *Psych. et morale*, 2:67-72.

¹⁷ *Summa Halensis la IIae*, tr. 1. q. 2. tit. 4. m. 1-2=Alexander of Hales, *Summa theologica*, ed. Collegium S. Bonaventurae (Quaracchi: Collegium S. Bonaventurae, 1928), 2:491-500; see also Lottin, "Syndérèse," *Psych. et morale*, 2:174-87.

Writing in the mid-thirteenth century, Bonaventure is far clearer.¹⁸ Beginning his analysis with conscience, he states that it is a *habitus* lodged in the practical intellect. It guides the actions of the affective and operative faculty. Conscience is innate. But what it endows us with is an aptitude, rather than with full-fledged moral norms. What we are all born with is the capacity to grasp moral first principles when our minds are illuminated by the *lux naturalis*. This last-mentioned qualification, the natural light, is important. For it locates this topic in the context of Bonaventure's pan-illuminationist epistemology, which regards divine illumination as necessary in all modes of human knowledge. At the same time, Bonaventure regards conscience as acquired, since the information on whose basis we grasp and act on first principles also comes from the senses. Thus, conscience deals both with general ethical norms and with their practical applications. For Bonaventure, *synderesis* is also a *habitus*. It is the efficient cause of the will. Its functions vis-à-vis the will parallel those of conscience vis-à-vis the practical intellect. In addition to being a *habitus*, each can

¹⁸Bonaventure, *Comm. in II Sent.* d. 39. a. 1. q. 1-3, a. 2. q. 1-3, in *Opera omnia*, ed. Collegium S. Bonaventurae (Quaracchi: Collegium S. Bonaventurae, 1885), 2:897-917. See also Lottin, "Syndérèse," *Psych. et morale*, 2:203-10. On Bonaventure's pan-illuminationist epistemology, its sources, and its immediate influence, see Steven P. Marrone, *In the Light of Thy Countenance: Science and the Knowledge of God in the Thirteenth Century* (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 1:29-108, 122-85, 201-50. Graziano Borgonovo, *Sinderesi e coscienza nel pensiero di San Tommaso d'Aquino: Contributi per un "ridimensionamento" della coscienza morale nella teologia contemporanea* (Fribourg: Éditions Universitaires, 1996), 31-50, 52-60, 71, includes Bonaventure only to clarify Aquinas by comparison and is concerned with medieval thought only insofar as he thinks it applicable to current Roman Catholic moral theology. I thank Tobias Hoffmann for the Borgonovo reference. For an accurate overview of thirteenth-century debates on the respective roles of intellect, conscience, and will with a fine discussion of Bonaventure, see M. W. F. Stone, "Moral Psychology before 1277: The Will, *liberum arbitrium*, and Rectitude in Bonaventure," in *The Will and Human Action from Antiquity to the Present*, ed. Thomas Pink and M. W. F. Stone (London: Routledge, 2004), 99-126. The reader is warned, however, that this paper by Stone proves to have been plagiarized; see Michael V. Dougherty et al., "40 Cases of Plagiarism," *Bulletin de philosophie médiévale*, 51 (2009): 350-91 at 369.

also be called a power, a *potentia*. Since *synderesis* resides in the will, it can be impeded by voluntary foot-dragging as well as by our passions and blindness of spirit. But it cannot be extinguished. Conscience also can err, since, in guiding the practical intellect, it may make incorrect applications of general norms. This account, which accents our moral fallibility as well as the inextinguishability of our moral sense, is really the first to address Jerome's *problématique* of the unrepentant Cain and the people who seem to lack any kind of moral compass, while situating the topic within Bonaventure's distinctive illuminationist epistemology.

Albert the Great also offers a lucid, distinctive, and influential account¹⁹. He begins with *synderesis*, defined as a natural and innate habitual power, a *vis cum habitu*, which furnishes inerrant and unexcogitated general moral principles to the practical intellect. *Synderesis* relays these principles to the conscience, which also inhabits the practical intellect. Conscience deals with concrete cases. It is an act, not a faculty or a *habitus*. With respect to our moral behavior, *synderesis* functions as the formal cause, conscience as the material cause. Albert frames these functions in terms of a deductive syllogism. *Synderesis* supplies the major premise. Informed by it,

¹⁹ Albert the Great, *Comm. in II Sent.* d. 5. a. 6. ad 6-7, d. 24. a. 14, d. 39. a. 2; *Summa de creaturis* pars 2: *De homine* q. 71-72, in *Opera omnia*, ed. Stephen C. A. Borgnet (Paris: Vivès, 1894), 27:121, 412-14, 621-22; 35:590-602. See also Lottin, "Syndérèse," *Psych. et morale*, 2:174-87; Christian T. Dijon, "La syndérèse selon Albert le Grand," in *Albertus Magnus: Zum Gedanken nach 800 Jahren. Neue Zugänge, Aspekte und Perspektiven*, ed. Walter Senner et al. (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2001), 255-73; Matthias Perkams, "Gewissensirrtum und Gewissensfreiheit," *Philosophisches Jahrbuch* 112 (2005): 31-50 at 35, 36, 49; Jörn Müller, "Agere contra conscientiam: The Relationship between Weakness of Will and Conscience in Albert the Great," in *Intellect et imagination dans la philosophie médiévale*, Actes du XIe congrès international de philosophie médiévale, Porto, 26-31 août 2002, ed. Maria Cândida Pacheco and José F. Meirinhos (Turnhout, 2006), 3:1303-15. Stanley B. Cunningham, *Reclaiming Moral Agency: The Moral Philosophy of Albert the Great* (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 2008), 119-24, 125 considers the morality of external acts, not the psychogenesis of inner intentions, in Albert.

practical reason supplies the minor premise, addressing the major premise to a concrete case. Conscience then draws the conclusion, providing a judgment on our duty to perform, or avoid, the act in question.

Thomas Aquinas adds but a few refinements to Albert's position.²⁰ He concedes, agreeing on this point with Alexander of Hales, that *synderesis* can be lost, in the case of madmen and mental defectives. Otherwise, it is retained by sinners, including the damned. While Aquinas holds that, in areas of ethics pertaining to supernature, faith must join with the intuition of *synderesis* for it to be right, in areas where natural reason and

²⁰ Thomas Aquinas, *Comm. in II Sent. d. 7. q. 1. a. 2, d. 24. q. 2. a. 3-4, d. 39. q. 3. a. 1-3; In III Sent. d. 33. q. 2. a. 4. sol. 4*, ed. Pierre Mandonnet and Maria Fabianus Moos (Paris: Lethellieux, 1929), 2:182-86, 609-15, 995-1005; 3:1066-67; *Quaestiones disputatae de veritate q. 16. a. 1-q. 17. a. 1-4*, 9th rev. ed., ed. Raymundi Spiazzi (Torino: Marietti, 1953), 1:320-25; *Summa theologiae Ia q. 79. a. 12-13; lallae q. 19. a. 5-6*, Blackfriars ed. and trans. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1966), 11:187-95; 18:61-67. See also Lottin, "Syndérèse," *Psych. et morale*, 2:222-35. For a recent and judicious study balancing intellect and will in Aquinas' analysis of conscientious decision-making, see Michael S. Sherwin, *By Knowledge and Love: Charity and Knowledge in the Moral Theology of St. Thomas* (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 2005), 18-62. See also Perkams, "Gewissensirrtum und Gewissensfreiheit," 35, 36-45, 48-49, who is interested in the utility of Aquinas for a philosophical position defensible today. Borgonovo, *Sinderesi e coscienza*, 69-118, 127-28, 192-227, reiterates the analytical schema of Oskar Renz, *Die Synteresis nach dem hl. Thomas von Aquin* (Münster: Aschendorff, 1911) and is primarily concerned with the issue of conscience in relation to the virtue of prudence in the judgment of cases of conscience, with respect to heretics, the invincibly ignorant, and similar issues. Some recent treatments of Aquinas focus instead on the theme that conscience obliges even if it errs; see, for example, Alessandro Ghisalberti, "Figure della coscienza nel pensiero medievale: Abelardo, Tommaso d'Aquino, Meister Eckhart," in *Coscienza: Storia e percorsi di un concetto*, ed. Luca Gabbi and Vittor Ugo Petruio (Roma: Donizelli Editore, 2000), 29-43, at 34-38; Giovanni Cavalcoli, "Autoscienza e coscienza morale in S. Tommaso d'Aquino," in *ibid*, 45-72; neither author notes Aquinas' view that the *scintilla rationis* can be lost, as in the insane.

natural law suffice, *synderesis* rules alone. Following Albert's syllogism analogy, he stresses that everything up to and including the judgment of conscience remains on the level of knowledge. In order to move from knowledge to act, free will must come into play. So, just as conscience can err in making specific applications of the general rules provided by *synderesis*, the will, too, may choose not to carry out the directives of conscience, whether they are correct or not. Error and sin can arise in both ways.

On the one side Bonaventure, and on the other side Albert as refined by Aquinas, largely define Franciscan and Dominican teaching on this theme in the last quarter of the thirteenth century. While there are faithful followers of both positions, eclecticism is equally evident. Many contemporary scholastics, whatever their allegiances, basically slice and dice, mix and match, without adding new insights²¹. This situation holds until the arrival of Duns Scotus, the last major scholastic to treat *synderesis* and conscience. Scotus puts a distinct authorial fingerprint on this topic while incorporating insights from both mendicant schools²². With the Dominicans, he locates both *synderesis* and

²¹ Lottin, *Synderèse*, "Psych. et morale, 2:236-338.

²² John Duns Scotus, *Ordinatio* 2. d. 39, in Wolter, *Duns Scotus*, 45-46, 162-66. See also Mary Elizabeth Ingham, "Practical Wisdom: Scotus' Presentation of Prudence," in *Duns Scotus: Metaphysics and Ethics*, ed. Ludger Honnefelder et al. (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 568-71, who notes the lack of an automatic transfer of the practical wisdom informed by *synderesis* to action in Scotus, but without commenting on the role of conscience in the psychogenesis of ethical acts in him; see also eadem, *La vie de sagesse: Le Stoïcisme au moyen âge* (Fribourg: Academic Press, 2007), with a fine discussion of Scotus' synthesis of Franciscan and Dominican thought on the rational will at 69-99, 103-8, 113-28. She sees Franciscans in particular as important for the survival of Stoicism in this area. I thank Mary Elizabeth Ingham for the latter reference. Timothy Noone, "Duns Scotus on Incontinentia," in *Das Problem der Willensschwäche*, ed. Hoffman, Müller, and Perkams, 285-305 at 294-96, 299, 303-4, stresses Scotus' location of conscience in the practical intellect and not in the will as taught by contemporaries such as Peter John Olivi and Henry of

conscience in the practical intellect. It is both natural and innate. The moral principles it cognizes are self-evident; no Bonaventurian illuminationism is needed. Conscience applies these general principles to concrete cases. Both *synderesis* and conscience inform the will, stimulating it to choose the good when the will inclines to the good out of affection for justice. But the will is constrained neither by intellect, knowledge, *synderesis*, nor conscience. They are only partial causes of the will's actions. For the will can act against conscience. Even when it does not do so, its acts can be motivated by advantage as well as by justice—a distinction Scotus borrows from Anselm of Canterbury. The bottom line, for Scotus as for his scholastic predecessors, is that the will must act freely. Thus, while the will may be inclined to follow the advice of conscience, we have no guarantee that it will do so. This Scotist solution, nicely balancing intellectualism with voluntarism, also preserves, notwithstanding an Aristotelian scholastic faculty psychology remote from Stoicism, an echo of the doctrine of the preferables taught by the Middle Stoic Panaetius, via the Ciceronian and Ambrosian doctrine of the *honestum* and the *utile* as recast by Augustine and Anselm. At the same time, Scotus shows his Aristotelian colors in citing justice as the short-hand index of virtue as an end in itself. His analysis, capitalizing on that of his scholastic forebears, offers a cogent account of how we make moral decisions, and answers the question, placed on the agenda by Seneca and problematized by Jerome, of how we can sin against conscience.

Ghent, and his view that the intellect acts determinately, on the basis of evidence or its absence, while the will's actions are indeterminate. Cf. Langston, *Conscience*, 53, 59, who claims that Scotus lacks a position on conscience but who then, at 54, attributes one to him that draws on both Bonaventure and Aquinas. For the parallel with Anselm, see Eileen C. Sweeney, *Anselm of Canterbury and the Desire for the Word* (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 2012), 196-211, 225-32, 361-63.

Some of the Stoics propose thought-experiments as a heuristic or rhetorical device. Concluding with one of our own, let us hypothesize Seneca's reaction were he brought back to life to review these post-classical discussions of *synderesis* and conscience. He might well find less troublesome than some modern commentators on Seneca himself the fact that some scholastics are able to combine innate ideas, self-evident principles grasped intuitively, and experience as sources of our moral norms. He would appreciate their attention to the psychodynamics of moral choice, and to intentionalism and free will. While dismissing their appropriation of Aristotle's tripartite soul, he might even concede that their application of Aristotle's distinction between the theoretical and practical intellect is a useful addendum to his own teaching. He would be alarmed by Jerome's obfuscations and approve the scholastics' efforts at clarification, even though *synderesis* is not a term in his own lexicon. Aware that these authors were Christians, he might yet be struck by how little their theology impinges on their handling of this topic. While they agree that humankind labors under the burden of original sin to a greater or lesser extent, their omission of that doctrine from their considerations of *synderesis* and conscience is a fact he would find noteworthy. In all, it is most likely that, in making this hypothetical survey of his own legacy on acting against conscience, Seneca would find more cause for satisfaction than for dismay. While recognizing that patristic and medieval thinkers have added new instruments and a new orchestration to his score, transposing his basic Stoic theme into a new key and composing new variations on it, he might well conclude that, in their hands, many of his favorite *Leitmotifs* remain fully audible, sounding, at the same time, both old and new.

Notes

The following abbreviations are used in this paper:

CCSL= Corpus christianorum series latina

CSEL = Corpus scriptorum ecclesiasticorum latinorum

SAEMO=Sancti Ambrosii episcopi mediolanensis opera

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