

# Weakness of Will in Renaissance and Reformation Thought

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# Introduction

‘Weakness of will’ is the English equivalent of Aristotle’s Greek term *akrasia*, which is extensively discussed in the seventh book of his *Nicomachean Ethics* (EN). A weak-willed or akratic person, the *akratês*, is one who acts against his or her better judgement.<sup>1</sup> Aristotle discusses this phenomenon because, on the one hand, Socrates thought it strange that when an agent has knowledge, something else could master his or her actions. No one acts against what he or she judges best. Given this Socratic position, we cannot act against our better judgement and there is no *akrasia*. On the other hand, this view contradicts the plain fact that people seem to act akratically fairly often. A philosopher needs to examine whether Socrates is right and, if he is, what seemingly akratic actions are in reality also needs to be explained (EN 1145b22–30).

Weakness of will poses philosophical problems which continue to interest serious thinkers. Since the 1960s especially Aristotle’s discussion has prompted a flood of new explanatory attempts. These in part relate to the closer historical understanding of Aristotle’s own view, but, and perhaps more importantly, they also address the issue of whether there are truly akratic actions.<sup>2</sup> Recent studies have revealed the amount of reflection devoted to this phenomenon in the history of Western thought.<sup>3</sup> Some earlier studies related sceptically to the relevance of *akrasia* in the era of Christianity, arguing that the Augustinian concept of will makes *akrasia* self-evident and that no significant discussion on *akrasia* took place between Aristotle and contemporary analytical philosophy.<sup>4</sup> A closer look at the sources soon reveals that this is not the case, at least with regard to medieval philosophy and theology.

The medieval period has been particularly productive in the history of the interpretation of *akrasia*. Once Aristotle’s EN had been reintroduced to Western intellectual

<sup>1</sup> The present study uses the terms ‘*akrasia*’, ‘weakness of will’, and ‘incontinence’ as synonyms. The word ‘incontinence’ derives from the Latin translation of *akrasia* as *incontinentia*. In the following, *akrasia* and *akrates* are written without italics when the phenomenon (and not merely the Greek word) is meant.

<sup>2</sup> A particularly influential turning-point of the contemporary discussion has been the essay by Davidson (1969). For the historical interpretations of *akrasia* in Plato and Aristotle, see Hardie (1980); Dahl (1984); Charles (1984); Spitzley (1992); Sorabji (2000), 305–15; Grcic (2002); Bobonich and Destrée (2007); and other works mentioned below. Recent comprehensive studies include Mele (1987); Peijnenburg (1996); Stroud and Tappolet (2003); Thero (2006); Stroud (2008).

<sup>3</sup> For historical overviews, see Gosling (1990); Spitzley (1992); Hügli (2004); Bobonich and Destrée (2007); Hoffmann (2008); Müller (2009).

<sup>4</sup> Charlton (1988), reporting other studies.

life in the thirteenth century, it became possible to compare Aristotle's insights with the Augustinian and Christian views of human action. Aristotle prevailed in this comparison to an astonishing extent, but there were also Augustinian and Franciscan critics who did not adopt the Aristotelian view of human action. In addition, new views of action theory emerged in fourteenth-century scholasticism. Although these nominally followed Aristotle and, in some cases, Augustine, they introduced new ways of understanding human action. The discussion of *akrasia* provided a conceptual laboratory in which new ideas could be tested and their implications spelled out.<sup>5</sup>

The richness of medieval philosophy has been discussed in many specialized studies. The results of this discussion have found their way into the more general historical presentations of *akrasia*.<sup>6</sup> This interest has not, however, extended to the early modern period. The standard work on philosophical terminology, *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie*, claims, immediately after its elaborate discussion of the medieval period, that 'weakness of will has not been a relevant concept or problem for the philosophy of the modern era. It only begins to be discussed again in the analytic philosophy'.<sup>7</sup> Given that many recent studies deal with *akrasia* in the writings of Descartes, Spinoza, Locke, Leibniz, and even Kant, this is a surprising statement.<sup>8</sup>

It may, however, contain a grain of truth. In order to find a discussion on 'weakness of will' in these philosophers, the interpreter must define *akrasia* in broad terms; for instance, as general irrationality in human behaviour. One may doubt whether the non-Aristotelian philosophers of the modern era really are discussing Aristotle's problem. As their conceptual framework appears to be a different one, they may not be discussing *akrasia* but other problems of irrationality in human action. When Justin Gosling writes that 'between the Middle Ages and the twentieth century... interest in these problems [of *akrasia*] vanishes',<sup>9</sup> he means that Aristotle's questions no longer appeared as genuine philosophical problems after the decline of medieval Aristotelianism.

My earlier study investigated Augustine's treatment of the so-called 'reluctant actions' (*invitus facere*) in addition to Aristotle's discussion. While that study focused on the medieval commentaries on Aristotle's EN, it also paid attention to the reception history of Augustine's views, claiming that his discussion deals with similar, although not identical, problems of 'weakness of will'. The present study follows the same

<sup>5</sup> Saarinen (1994); Hoffmann, Müller, and Perkams (2006) and Müller (2009) offer a comprehensive overview of medieval *akrasia*. See also 1.3–1.5 below.

<sup>6</sup> Kent (1995); Hügli (2004); Hoffmann, Müller, and Perkams (2006); Müller (2006; 2007; 2009); Hoffmann (2008).

<sup>7</sup> Hügli (2004), 805: 'Für die Philosophie der Neuzeit ist Willensschwäche weder als Begriff noch als Problem von Bedeutung. Zum Diskussionspunkt wird Willensschwäche erst wieder in der Analytischen Philosophie.'

<sup>8</sup> Descartes: Ong-Van-Cung (2003) and McCarthy (2008). Spinoza: Savile (2003) and Koivuniemi (2008). Locke: Vailati (1990) and Glaser (2003). Leibniz: Hintikka (1988); Vailati (1990); Davidson (2005); Roinila (2007). Kant: Hill (2008).

<sup>9</sup> Gosling (1990), 196.

twofold pattern. While the Augustinian discussion needs to be kept distinct from Aristotle's, both discussions are often intertwined in the same sources. My sources do not deal with all the possible problems related to free will and irrationality during the Renaissance and the Reformation. The main criterion of my choice of sources is that they belong to the immediate reception history of Aristotle's and Augustine's treatment of the phenomenon of acting against one's own better judgement.

The present study aims to show that the statement of the *Historisches Wörterbuch* quoted above is wrong, at least as far as the early modern period (c. 1350–1630) is concerned. It will be shown that weakness of will was both a relevant concept and a significant problem during this period. In spite of the flood of recent studies on *akrasia*, this period has remained completely devoid of scholarly attention. Even the extensive and in many respects very useful new volume *Weakness of Will from Plato to the Present* (Hoffmann (2008)) only discusses Dante and Montaigne, two writers whose texts are only distantly related to the interpretation history of *akrasia*.

The present study makes two distinct but related historical claims. First, the classical problem of weakness of will was the source of lively debates and significant innovations during the Renaissance and the Reformation. These debates and innovations concern both the specific nature of Aristotelian *akrasia* and the broader discussion on irrationality, desire, and reluctant actions. Second, the study of these debates and innovations sheds light on the general understanding of the human condition during the formative period between medieval times and early modernity. The theological premises of the human condition are visible, moreover, in the Reformation teaching of sin and free will. These doctrines are connected with the philosophical problem of weakness of will in various ways. Furthermore, the philosophical background of the Renaissance and the Reformation is not restricted to Augustinian and Aristotelian features, but Platonism and Stoicism are also reconsidered and re-evaluated. Human weakness, divided will, and the conflict between reason and desire are extensively discussed in Platonic and Neo-Stoic contexts.

In order to make visible the broader significance of our topic for the early modern history of ideas, it is often necessary to treat the theological and philosophical perspectives simultaneously. The authors of our period were for the most part deeply aware of both theological and philosophical traditions. Their understanding of the human condition should not, therefore, be reduced to either philosophy or theology, but the two perspectives need to be combined in our reading of their texts. Although many of the authors of the Reformation period are primarily theologians and many Renaissance authors primarily philosophers, the present study claims that they fundamentally belong to the same tradition of discussing human weakness in its various manifestations.

The present study does not aim at making a sharp distinction between the Renaissance and the different European Reformations. All authors contribute to the ongoing discussion on human weakness; most authors are also connected with the Humanist movement in some way. For the sake of convenience, however, the Renaissance and the Lutheran and Calvinist Reformations are discussed in different chapters. The

borderlines between the chapters are flexible: for instance, historically speaking Lefèvre d'Étaples and John Mair (2.4, 2.5) both belong to the Renaissance and the Reformation period, and the section on Luther's Erfurt background (3.1) deals with issues also discussed in the chapter on the Renaissance (2). Some of the Renaissance authors contribute to the Reformation of the Catholic Church and its teaching. Due to many such overlaps, the boundaries between the Renaissance and the Reformations should not be defined in any rigid manner.

The interconnected nature of philosophy and theology has also shaped the selection of source materials. Renaissance and Reformation authors continued to write commentaries on EN VII. *Nicomachean Ethics* remained in the university curriculum at least until the emergence of Cartesianism, and one can therefore easily find long discussions of akrasia in the extant commentaries. Early modern commentaries on EN are an important genre among the sources of the present study.

There are, however, several reasons why commentaries remain a necessary but insufficient part of the whole story. New literary genres, such as textbooks, dictionaries, and monographic treatises emerge in the Renaissance and the Reformation.<sup>10</sup> The relative importance of commentaries is no longer comparable to the medieval period. In addition, many early modern commentaries are humanistic, educational, and philological rather than philosophical in their approach. Although they may explicate text of EN VII at great length, they do not necessarily pose or even recognize its problems in a critical and analytical manner.

Another new factor was introduced by the confessional divide between Catholic and Protestant authors. A fairly extensive theological background is necessary in order to understand the philosophical discussions, since weakness of will is often discussed in theological literature. One important feature of this literature is that both Catholics and Protestants claim that Aristotle and Augustine are on their side. In particular, Augustine's discussion on the phenomenon of acting against one's own will is treated in very different texts, from biblical commentaries on Romans 7 to philosophical treatises intended to heal the divided soul.

It should be added that, even for the medieval period, we now realize that the approach based on the commentaries on Aristotle's EN remains too narrow. The studies that have been published since my *Weakness of the Will in Medieval Thought* (1994) have revealed a great many, highly interesting medieval sources apart from the commentaries.<sup>11</sup>

Given the exponential growth of texts and literary genres in the Renaissance and the Reformation, one needs to be selective with the sources. I have attempted to include the most influential philosophical commentaries on EN, whereas the primarily philological expositions have been left aside. My selection of textbooks and treatises is conditioned by their use of Aristotle and Augustine, but limitations of space also play

<sup>10</sup> See Kraye (1988); Lines (2002); Kraye and Saarinen (2005); Saarinen (forthcoming).

<sup>11</sup> See Kent (1995); Hoffmann, Müller, and Perkams (2006); Müller (2007) and (2009).

a role. Authors belonging to certain periods and geographical areas, such as Renaissance Italy from 1350 to 1450 or early sixteenth-century Germany did not produce many innovative commentaries on Aristotle. But these authors, for instance, Petrarch or Martin Luther, do interpret Augustine's views on powerless will in a creative and challenging fashion. During Protestant Aristotelianism (1560–1630), the flood of commentaries and textbooks is again massive. Many relevant texts deriving from this period need to be left aside.<sup>12</sup> I have attempted to offer a representative selection.

Most authors of both the Renaissance and the Reformation affirm the Humanist principle *ad fontes*. They are very conscious of the ancient and medieval interpretation traditions, which we need to outline before proceeding to the actual sources. Although Aristotle's discussion remains the standard against which other discussions are measured, it is also essential to sketch the understanding of *akrasia* in Plato, Stoicism, and Augustine (1.1–1.2). While the precise relationship of these three ancient traditions to Aristotle's discussion can be debated, they all remain important in the course of reception history.

The medieval views are summarized with the help of a threefold classification: the Aristotelian views of Thomas Aquinas and Walter Burley (1.3), the Franciscan voluntarist critique of Walter of Bruges and Henry of Ghent (1.4), and the Augustinian-Aristotelian syntheses undertaken by Albert the Great and John Buridan (1.5). In presenting these three strains of interpretation, special attention is paid to the important new studies which have appeared since the publication of my own study in 1994.

Although the four currents of ancient thought (Plato, Aristotle, Stoicism, and Augustine), and the three classes of medieval interpretation remain ideal types, they are sufficient to capture the sources employed by later Renaissance and Reformation authors. A preliminary typology or 'inventory' of different models of *akrasia* appears at the end of 1.5. This typology is applied in later chapters to the varying explanations of *akrasia* during the Renaissance and the Reformation.

Several new studies have argued that the *Quattrocento* was not an innovative period in the history of Aristotelian ethics and that this situation only changed with the publication of the famous *Tres conversiones* of Jacques Lefèvre d'Étaples in 1497.<sup>13</sup> The present study modifies this view, pointing out many different developments during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Francesco Petrarch's innovative treatment of virtues and will in *Secretum* and *De remediis utriusque fortunae* contains noteworthy passages which can be regarded as the beginning of Renaissance discussions on *akrasia* (2.1).

After Petrarch, we will turn to Donato Acciaiuoli as the most influential representative of the reception of Aristotle in Renaissance Italy (2.2). Moving north of the Alps, special attention is then paid to John Versor, Virgilius Wellendorffer, Jacques Lefèvre

<sup>12</sup> In particular, philological commentaries and works of Catholic moral theology. See the discussion in the beginning of 2.5 below.

<sup>13</sup> Krayer (1995); Kessler (1999); Lines (2002), 17–18.

d'Étaples, Josse Clichtove, and John Mair (2.3–2.5). The final part of this chapter returns to Italy, dealing with Francesco Piccolomini (2.6).

The third chapter begins with the dawn of the Lutheran Reformation. In order to understand Martin Luther's view of the fundamental incapacity of the human will, it is necessary to begin with some ethical and psychological views of his teachers in Erfurt (3.1). Another important factor was the interpretation of Romans 7 in the Augustinian tradition. In his formative years, Luther expounded this biblical text several times to highlight his own views. For a deeper understanding of subsequent Reformation thought, it is crucial to see whether and in what precise sense Romans 7 relates to *akrasia*. Given these preliminaries, it is possible to establish Luther's view of weakness of will within its immediate historical context (3.2). The third chapter then proceeds to Philip Melancthon and Joachim Camerarius, who wrote the first Lutheran commentaries on EN (3.3). The last part of the chapter deals with the Lutheran Aristotelians, Theophilus Golius and Wolfgang Heider (3.4).

John Calvin's *Institutio christianae religionis* contains a thematic discussion on Aristotle's *akrasia* (4.1). The Calvinist Reformation was often characterized by great academic erudition, which led to conscious renewal in ethics. In addition to Calvin, we analyse the interpretations of *akrasia* in early Calvinist Ramism (Theodor Zwinger) and Humanism (Hubert van Giffen) (4.2), as well as in Lambert Daneau's programme of 'Christian ethics' (4.3). The systematic textbooks of John Case and Bartholomaeus Keckermann round out the picture of Calvinism (4.4).

The first part of the fifth chapter (5.1) presents an overall summary of our findings, bringing together the materials discussed separately in the three previous chapters. In addition, the fifth chapter briefly discusses the views of some founding fathers of modernity, namely Shakespeare (5.2), Descartes, Spinoza, and Leibniz (5.3). Their understanding of *akrasia* has to some extent been dealt with in earlier studies, but our discussion situates them within the broader historical discussion on weakness of will.



# 1

## Ancient and Medieval Background

### 1.1 Plato and Aristotle

Our cursory discussion of ancient philosophy cannot cover the whole variety of interpretations available in contemporary research.<sup>1</sup> We will be content with presenting the basic texts, their well-known problems of interpretation, and the prevailing scholarly views. Our main focus is on those problems that are relevant within the context of the Renaissance and the Reformation.

In *Protagoras* 351–8, Plato describes the view of Socrates, which is later discussed by Aristotle in EN VII. Socrates argues that since agents always choose what they think best, our knowledge cannot be overcome through emotions like pleasure, fear, or anger, although many people commonly say this is the case. When people seemingly act against their knowledge, they in reality do not possess a firm judgement, their judgement following the illusory presentations of the moment. Thus at each moment they in fact do follow their momentary judgement, based on, for instance, the judgement that pleasure is good. Their reason is not overcome by pleasure, but it judges that pleasure should be pursued.

In other words, the person who follows pleasure or fear follows the judgement recommending this course of action. This person remains ignorant of true virtue, but he or she chooses what he momentarily thinks best. Socrates summarizes this view as follows:

No one willingly goes to meet evil or what he thinks to be evil. To make for what one believes to be evil, instead of making for the good, is not, it seems, in human nature, and when faced with the choice of two evils no one will choose the greater when he might choose the less. (358c–d)

In the fourth book of the *Republic*, however, Plato introduces his tripartite division of the soul and compares it with the classes of society. The appetitive and the spirited lower parts of the soul are distinctive of the lower classes and individuals, whereas rationality is distinctive of the ruling class and the philosophers. In this context, Plato allows for a genuine conflict between reason and desires. He seems to admit that many,

<sup>1</sup> Bobonich and Destrée (2007), Hoffmann (2008), and Müller (2009) contain new studies and excellent bibliographic information. See also Sorabji (2000), 305–10.

if not most people are governed by their appetite or spiritedness, although their reason keeps warning them. Here Socrates teaches that

the soul of a man within him has a better part and a worse part, and the expression self-mastery means the control of the worse by the naturally better part . . . But when, because of bad breeding or some association, the better part, which is the smaller, is dominated by the multitude of the worse, I think that our speech censures this as a reproach, and calls the man in this plight unself-controlled and licentious. (431a–b)

Plato's *Republic* thus conveys the classic picture of a struggle between reason and desire. Reason should rule the lower parts and, in a virtuous person, reason in fact rules and prompts good actions. But akrasia remains a genuine possibility in a situation in which the better part stays alive but is mastered by the lower. Thus the *Republic* seems to justify the commonplace view of akrasia which is criticized in *Protagoras*. Although the wise person cannot be akratic, ordinary people often are.

Given these two texts, it is possible to label two different views as 'Platonic'. According to the first view, Plato adopts the Socratic view and denies the possibility of akrasia, even among ordinary people. According to the second view, Platonism holds that (a) the soul is tripartite, (b) that there are, at least in ordinary people, genuine conflicts between reason and desire, and (c) that desire can sometimes overcome the better part of the soul.

There is some evidence that the later books of the *Republic* again revise Plato's view towards the Socratic position. It has been argued that the tripartite division of the soul represents a preliminary stage of psychological analysis and that Plato finally defends the unity of the soul. This unity is forged in the *Republic* V–VII and is based on knowledge and rationality. The picture of true knowledge and love of truth which is achieved in Book VII is similar to that of *Protagoras*.<sup>2</sup> Other scholars maintain, however, that the *Republic* contains two different moral psychologies.<sup>3</sup> Still others consider that the two views can be reconciled through a distinction between first-order and second-order desires (desiring p vs desiring not to desire p); in such a case, the akratic person possesses good judgement only in a second-order sense.<sup>4</sup>

For the purposes of our reception history it is important to note the continuing influence of the two pictures. The 'commonplace' view of the *Republic* IV which allows for the conflicts within the tripartite soul was later employed in order to refute overly intellectualist views, whereas the philosophical view of Socrates became influential as the basis of Aristotle's reflection.

Aristotle begins his discussion by outlining a scale of virtuous and vicious moral states:

Let us . . . point out that of moral states to be avoided there are three kinds—vice, incontinence, brutishness. The contraries of two of these are evident—one we call excellence, the other

<sup>2</sup> Dorter (2008).

<sup>3</sup> Shields (2007), 86.

<sup>4</sup> Bobonich (2007).

continence; to brutishness it would be most fitting to oppose superhuman excellence, something heroic and divine. (EN 1145a15–20)

The commentators of the Renaissance and the Reformation are very interested in these classifications. Although EN VII treats many classifications only in passing, commentators can use Aristotle's brief remarks as a springboard to develop their own views. The basic classification of six moral states presupposes that virtue and vice are the normative standards which are superseded by heroic virtue and brutishness, whereas continence and incontinence represent an underdeveloped stage of virtue or wickedness.<sup>5</sup>

Continence (*enkrateia*) is, therefore, an incomplete virtue, and incontinence (*akrasia*) an incomplete vice. Aristotle also says that the incontinent is half-wicked (EN 1152a18). Later interpreters often understand temperance (cf. EN 1151a18) to be the full virtue to which continence relates as an underdeveloped stage. Accordingly, *akrasia* is less bad than intemperance. Virtuous and continent people both act well, but the continent person would feel pleasure in acting contrary to reason; he therefore performs a virtuous action with some difficulty. The wicked or intemperate person does not think that he ought to live according to reason, but the akratic person thinks that he should. However, both the intemperate and the akratic person in reality act contrary to reason (EN 1151b–1152a).

In addition to the six moral states, Aristotle mentions some others but leaves their precise role somewhat open. Endurance (*karteria*) and softness (*malakia*) are closely related to continence and *akrasia* in EN VII, 1. Aristotle concludes that continence is better than endurance. The man of endurance can resist passions but not conquer them, whereas the continent person conquers the passions. The soft person is not defeated by appetites and pains, but he avoids them. Aristotle is critical of softness and seems to consider it a worse state than *akrasia* (EN 1150a24–b6).

Aristotle distinguishes between variants of softness and *akrasia*, depending on which intense pleasures and pains cause the deviant action and how. That variant of *akrasia* which is caused by natural desires, for instance anger and bad temper, is less bad than *akrasia* caused by the appetite for excess (EN 1149b4–10). Likewise, if a person is defeated by violent pleasures which could conquer most people, he can more easily be forgiven than the man who is defeated by pleasures which most people can resist (EN 1150b6–10). Another category is the so-called precipitate *akrasia*, in which the person rushes into action without proper deliberation (EN 1150b19–22; 1152a18–19). Later, for instance in Epictetus, this variant of *akrasia* is discussed as the vice of precipitancy (*propeteia*).<sup>6</sup>

It is common in Aristotelianism to treat the six moral states mentioned in EN 1145a15–20 as the basic matrix. Additional classes, in particular endurance, softness,

<sup>5</sup> Bobonich and Destrée (2007) and Hoffmann (2008) contain new studies and good bibliographies on Aristotle's *akrasia*. Among older works, Charles (1984) remains very valuable.

<sup>6</sup> See Salles (2007), referring to Epictetus, *Discourses* 1, 28, 30; 2, 1, 10; 3, 22, 104; 4, 4, 46; 4, 8, 1; 4, 13, 5.

and the different variants of *akrasia*, appear to have a contextual character. They are employed in judging the moral quality of particular actions, but their precise meaning depends on the discussion at hand.

Aristotle's philosophical problems do not, however, relate to the issues of classification but to the claim by Socrates that 'there is no such thing as incontinence' (EN 1145b25). According to Aristotle, 'this view contradicts the plain phenomena, and we must inquire about what happens to such a man' (EN 1145b28). The results of this enquiry continue to be debated in today's research, as they were in medieval philosophy. Because of this openness with regard to the possible explanations of weakness of will, the reception history of EN VII remains complex and generates new views of human action. Given that Aristotle classifies *akrasia* as a basic moral state and discusses its variants and their moral value, it is evident that he does not share the view of Socrates. For Aristotle, *akrasia* is a common phenomenon in need of closer examination.

At the same time, Aristotle's discussion remains sympathetic to Socrates insofar as the so-called 'clear-eyed *akrasia*' is concerned. Following many previous studies, I will use the phrase 'clear-eyed *akrasia*' to depict a case in which the agent with perfect knowledge of the relevant facts and an adequate use of reason acts against his or her better judgement. Aristotle does not allow for this kind of *akratic* action, setting out to show that the incontinent person ignores something or commits a logical error in his or her *akratic* action.

Aristotle makes three distinctions with regard to how a person knows the facts relevant to his action. (1) A person may have the knowledge but not exercise it (EN 1146b31–35); (2) a person may know the universal propositions relevant for his action (e.g. dry food is good for you), but ignore some particular proposition (e.g. this food is dry, EN 1147a1–9); (3) some people may even claim to have knowledge but yet do not have it in the proper and effective manner, as is the case with the drunken man who utters the verses of Empedocles (EN 1147a10–23, b12). Common, though not clear-eyed, instances of *akrasia* can thus take place when the person's knowledge of the good is qualified in one of these three ways.

In addition to these qualifications, Aristotle in this context introduces his famous doctrine of the practical syllogism, a logical framework which explains the emergence of action. Without entering into an extensive discussion of the nature of the practical syllogism, we can briefly describe it as follows: the practical syllogism consists of a major premise which recommends a certain conduct in universal terms (e.g. everything sweet ought to be tasted) and a minor premise which conveys the particular and perceptible circumstances now relevant for the agent (e.g. this is sweet). When the two premises appear together, the soul must in theoretical syllogisms affirm the logical conclusion, but in a practical syllogism it must immediately act (EN 1147a25–30). In other words, the conclusion of the practical syllogism is the action corresponding to the norm or recommendation.

The doctrine of the practical syllogism effectively denies the possibility of clear-eyed akrasia. If the relevant premises are clearly and simultaneously present in the agent's mind, he or she must act according to their outcome; the outcome is in itself the action. Therefore, something must be wrong in the practical syllogism of the akratic person. In this syllogistic context, Aristotle explains the emergence of akrasia as follows:

Since the last proposition (*protasis*) is a belief about a perceptible object and is what determines our action, either a man does not have this when he is in a state of passion or he has it in the sense in which having knowledge is not knowing but merely saying something—as a drunken man may be said to have knowledge of the verses of Empedocles. And because the last term is not universal nor an object of knowledge equally with a universal term, what Socrates was seeking seems to turn out to be correct; for it is not in the presence of what is thought to be proper knowledge that the affection of incontinence arises nor is it that which is dragged about as a result of a state of passion but it is in the presence rather of perceptual knowledge. (EN 1147b9–18)

The precise meaning of this passage has been extensively debated. Aristotle evidently follows a middle way between Socrates and the commonplace view. In Aristotle's view, passion cannot enslave the universal truths which are proper knowledge expressed in the major premise. Passion can, however, influence the perceptual knowledge of the particulars so that something with regard to them remains ignored. Thus the proper action does not emerge, the person acting akratically contrary to the knowledge expressed in the major premise.

What remains debatable in this crucial passage is the actual nature of perceptual knowledge. An obvious and widespread interpretation holds that the details of the minor premise remain to an extent ignored. In my previous study I labelled this interpretation '1a'.<sup>7</sup> A somewhat stronger or more clear-eyed case of akrasia is '1b', an interpretation in which it is claimed that the akratic person can grasp both the universals and the particulars but cannot combine them in a proper syllogistic manner. According to this model, akrasia resembles the logical errors described in *Prior Analytics* (67b5–11).<sup>8</sup> Both of these interpretations take the 'last protasis' to refer to the minor premise.

A third possibility, designated number '2', reads the 'last *protasis*' in EN 1147b9 as pertaining to the propositional conclusion of the syllogism.<sup>9</sup> In terms of this interpretation, it is possible to distinguish between the propositional and the dynamic level of the conclusion and to claim that it is possible to reach the conclusion intellectually and yet act contrary to it. This model is more 'clear-eyed' than 1a and 1b, though not

<sup>7</sup> According to Charles (1984), 117, 'most recent commentators' support this view. See also, e.g. Sorabji (2000), 311–12. Bobonich and Destrée (2007) offer new contributions.

<sup>8</sup> For this view, see Hardie (1980), 282–6. See also my discussion in Saarinen (1994), 12–13 and Hintikka (1978).

<sup>9</sup> This, according to Sorabji (2000), 312, is the 'minority interpretation' put forward in Charles (1984) and Dahl (1984); see also Charles (2007).

completely so, since Aristotle in EN 1147b9–18 holds that the last *protasis*, the propositional conclusion, is only grasped by the agent in an imperfect manner.

All three models have found support in modern scholarship; in fact, all three found adherents in medieval philosophy.<sup>10</sup> While 1a and 1b need not assume the existence of propositional conclusion, model 2 has some other benefits with regard to Aristotle's discussion. One of these benefits pertains to Aristotle's notion of choice (*prohairesis*). Since the Aristotelian choice is the state which transforms the results of practical reason into action, it does not choose freely among alternatives but effectively supports the rational judgement. In EN 1152a15–17, Aristotle holds that the akratic person acts voluntarily but is not wicked, since his choice is good. In EN 1111b13–15, Aristotle remarks that the akratic person acts with appetite but not with choice.

Since Aristotle evidently thinks that the akratic person has the good choice, it would be somewhat odd to claim that he ignores the minor premise (1a) or cannot combine the two premises (1b). In these cases, the good choice would not emerge, whereas model 2, in affirming that the akratic reasoning leads to a conclusion and the corresponding good choice, is in keeping with this view of choice. In the model 2, the propositional conclusion and the good choice are formed in the mind of the akratic person, but for some reason they remain imperfect and therefore cannot prevent the emergence of the passionate act contrary to choice. The akratic act is nevertheless voluntary (*hekousion*), since the agent is neither ignorant nor compelled to perform it. It is important to note that the traditional translations of *hekousion* and *prohairesis* do not contain all modern meanings ascribed to 'voluntary' and 'choice'.

We will not discuss further which of the three models should be preferred in the historical understanding of Aristotle's *akrasia*. All three are Aristotelian in the sense that they deny clear-eyed *akrasia* but affirm the existence of *akrasia* as a common moral state. The three models further differ from later non-Aristotelian models in two important respects. First, the models presuppose the overarching importance of the practical syllogism which guides the rational deliberation towards one alternative which is preferred in the final judgement. There should not be lasting internal conflict, the psychology of the mind being harmonious and teleological. Second, there is no 'free will' involved in the sense of later Western philosophy. In these two respects Aristotelianism differs from Stoicism and Augustinianism.

## 1.2 Stoicism, Paul, and Augustine

Stoicism was an important current in Renaissance and Reformation thought. Most authors want to keep a critical distance from Stoicism, but aspects of Stoic theories of emotions and action are both consciously and unconsciously employed in the discussions on weakness of will. The fragmentary nature of the extant sources makes the

<sup>10</sup> For medieval views, see Saarinen (1994) and 1.3–1.5 below.

precise reconstruction of original Stoic positions difficult and hypothetical. The new study by Gourinat reminds us that the words *akrasia* and *akratés* appear only three times in the *Stoicorum veterum fragmenta* and twice in Epictetus. Sorabji holds that Seneca's *impotentia* and *impotens* correspond to Aristotle's Greek terms, but Gourinat doubts this. He is also critical of Zeller's view, according to which Cicero's term *intemperantia* could be a translation of *akrasia*.<sup>11</sup>

There is a much-discussed passage in Chrysippus in which the term *akratés* appears. We will continue the discussion on its interpretation, keeping in mind that Gourinat warns of drawing far-reaching conclusions on the basis of a single occurrence of the word. The passage is particularly relevant for us for two reasons: (1) its description of *akrasia* resembles Augustine's elaboration of incontinence in *Confessions* 8, and (2) Galen and Chrysippus employ the story of Medea as an illustration of this kind of *akrasia*. Both *Confessions* 8 and the story of Medea continue to have a formative importance for the understanding of *akrasia* in the Renaissance and the Reformation.

Galen quotes Chrysippus as follows:

Such states are like those that are out of control (*akrateis*), as if the men had no power over themselves but were carried away, just as those who run hard are carried along and have no control over that sort of movement. But those who move with reason as their guide and steer their course by it, no matter what the nature of the reasoning, have control over, or are not subject to, that kind of movement and its impulses.<sup>12</sup>

A little earlier in the text Galen discusses the story of Medea as portrayed by Euripides and interpreted by Chrysippus. When Medea sets out to kill her children in order to take vengeance on her husband, she says: 'I know what evil I propose to do, but anger rules my deliberations.' For Chrysippus, Medea is a case of *akrasia* within the unified intellectual soul: she has good judgement, but she nevertheless rationally continues her plan of vengeance. Galen, however, prefers a commonplace Platonist reading which presupposes a threefold division within the soul, holding that Medea's reason was overpowered by the passion of anger.<sup>13</sup>

Recent discussion on the so-called Stoic *akrasia* has concentrated on the two examples provided by Chrysippus. To understand the cases of Medea and the runner who cannot stop running better, we need a more comprehensive outline of the Stoic theory of action, in which three faculties of the soul contribute to the emergence of action. First, there is impression (*phantasia*) which arises as the result of perception. In

<sup>11</sup> Gourinat (2007), 215, 241–4, referring to Zeller (1909), 234 and Sorabji (2000), 54–65. The word *akrasia* appears in the New Testament in Matt. 23:25 (Vulgate: *immunditia*) and 1 Cor. 7:5 (Vulgate: *incontinentia*); the word *akratés* appears in 2 Tim. 3:3. The triad of 2 Tim. 3:3: *akratés, anhémeros, aphilagathos* (Vulgate: *incontinens, immitis, sine benignitate*) resembles Aristotle's threefold classification of vice. See further Saarinen (2008a), 148–9.

<sup>12</sup> Translation from Gourinat (2007), 241, 244, who also discusses various translation problems. Galen, *Plac. Hipp. et Plat.* 4, 4, 24, ed. De Lacy (1978–1984), 256.

<sup>13</sup> Galen, *Plac. Hipp. et Plat.* 4, 2, 27, ed. De Lacy (1978–1984), 244. Euripides, *Medea* 1078–9. See further Gill (1983); Price (1994); Sorabji (2000), 56; Graver (2007), 70–4; Müller (2009), 54–61.

animals, the impression immediately calls forth a second faculty, a desire or impulse (*horme*) to move. In humans, however, reason first passes judgements on various impressions. A third faculty, that of assent (*sunkatathesis*), accompanies the judgement so that the impression is joined with the impulse to move. In humans, assent thus mediates between sensual impressions and impulses to move.<sup>14</sup>

According to Origen's description of Stoicism,

ensouled things are moved by themselves when an impression occurs within them which calls forth an impulse... A rational animal, however, in addition to its impressionistic nature, has reason which passes judgement on impressions, rejecting some of these and accepting others, in order that the animal may be guided accordingly.<sup>15</sup>

Plutarch reports that the most disputed subject in the Stoic doctrine concerns the view that

without assent there is neither action nor impulsion, and that they are talking nonsense... who claim that, when an appropriate impression occurs, impulsion ensues at once without people first having yielded or given their assent.<sup>16</sup>

Given this view, 'all impulses are acts of assent'.<sup>17</sup>

This view of assent is a Stoic innovation which has no counterpart in Plato's and Aristotle's theory of action. The classical philosophers understand that rational deliberation results in finding best proper means to reach the one goal. This unified result is expressed in reason's judgement and the corresponding choice (*prohairesis*). The Hellenistic Stoics, however, affirm the possibility of conflicting impressions and conflicting judgements related to them. Although the sage may have learned to eliminate misguided impressions, the ordinary person is surrounded by a variety of different impressions which are not, according to Origen,<sup>18</sup> under our control. Although the Stoic assent is not a faculty of free will but a faculty which coexists with the prevailing judgement, the assent must 'reject some' impressions while 'accepting others', as Origen tells us. In this sense, the plurality of options is expressed more strongly than in classical philosophy. While Socrates and Aristotle believe that rational deliberation finally leads to the judgement related to the one goal, the Stoics locate judgement and assent at the beginning of the road of rationality. Thus the agent needs to operate with an initial plurality of conflicting options.

An important corollary of the Stoic view is that all passions, like anger, fear, and distress, are already judgements assented to and therefore functions of the reasoning

<sup>14</sup> Long and Sedley (1987), 321–2. Graver (2007), 67–71 discusses 'the runner who cannot stop running'. Müller (2009), 165–83 deals with Chrysippus's example of Medea. I will not, however, go into their interpretations in detail, but present merely a general outline of Stoicism.

<sup>15</sup> Long-Sedley, 313, quoting Origen, *De principiis* 3, 1, 2–3.

<sup>16</sup> Long-Sedley, 317, quoting Plutarch, *On Stoic self-contradictions* 1057A.

<sup>17</sup> Long-Sedley, 197, quoting *Stobaeus* 2, 88, 2–6.

<sup>18</sup> So Origen, *De principiis* 3, 1, 2–3, as explained in Gosling (1990), 65. Müller (2009), 213–43 studies Origen's concept of *akrasia*.



faculty. If the impressions lead to impulse only when a rational judgement and assent is given to them, then all passions (desires, impulses, aspects of *hormé*) are by definition judgements. The Stoics want to assert a strong unity of the soul in which all desires express a judgement. Commonplace Platonists like Plutarch and Galen criticize this view as being contrary to our psychological experience which, so they believe, perceives the conflict between reason and the passions. Thus, according to Galen, Chrysippus in his Stoic definitions of passions

completely departs from the doctrine of the ancients, defining distress as ‘a fresh opinion that something bad is present’ . . . In these definitions he obviously mentions only the rational part of the soul, omitting the appetitive and competitive.<sup>19</sup>

This quote reveals how the commonplace Platonist critique presupposes the threefold division of the soul. By contrast, Chrysippus and his Stoic followers teach that there cannot be any internal conflict between reason and desire, because all impulses emerge as the results of judgement and are thus rational. As the grown-up person is a rational being, all impressions she receives are judgemental. If this person fears, she is not overcome by the desire for fear, but she has judged it fitting to fear. Epictetus says that it is not things themselves that disturb men, but their judgements about things. For example, death is nothing terrible . . . what is terrible is the judgement that death is terrible. So whenever we are impeded or disturbed or distressed, let us blame no one but ourselves, that is, our own judgements.<sup>20</sup>

Given the Stoic unity of the soul and the judgemental nature of passions it does not seem to make sense to say that somebody acts against her own better judgement or that there is a genuine conflict between reason and passion. All impulses simply represent the rational judgement the person has. According to Plutarch, the Stoics

say that passion is no different from reason, and that there is no dissension and conflict between the two, but a turning of the single reason in both directions, which we do not notice owing to the sharpness and speed of the change . . . For appetite and anger and fear and all such things are corrupt opinions and judgements, which do not arise about just one part of the soul but are the whole commanding-faculty’s inclinations, yieldings, assents and impulses, and, quite generally, activities which change rapidly.<sup>21</sup>

Given this analysis of the inner life of the mind, there are no real conflicts but merely sudden changes of opinion. From a commonplace Platonist viewpoint, such a doctrine is contrary to our psychological experience.

Although the Stoic view of judgement and assent differs from Socrates and Aristotle, the Stoics are no less intellectualistic in their theory of action; perhaps they are even more so than the classical philosophers, since they teach that all impulses stem from

<sup>19</sup> Long-Sedley, 411–12, quoting Galen, *Plac. Hipp. et Plat.* 4, 2, 1–6.

<sup>20</sup> Long-Sedley, 418, quoting Epictetus, *Manual* 5.

<sup>21</sup> Long-Sedley, 412, quoting Plutarch, *On moral virtue* 446F–447A.

judgement and assent. If this is the whole story, then there is no place for akrasia. If somebody goes wrong, it is due to their poor judgement. There cannot be a case in which the wrong impression is followed while the person assents to the right alternative.

Several scholars have argued, however, that the reality of Stoicism is more complicated, and that the hostile reports that Plutarch, Galen, and others give is a somewhat distorted picture.<sup>22</sup> There are at least two different ways of introducing akrasia into the Stoic discussion. One way proceeds from the so-called *propatheiai*, pre-passions, residual impulses activated immediately by the impressions. In animals and small children the impulses emerge in this manner, without the control of reason's assent. Although rational adults act according to their judgement and assent, they may possess the residual traces of pre-passions. For instance, a trace of natural pre-passion towards some good could be found in a person who acts according to his misguided judgements. In this limited sense there may be some residual 'impulse towards the better' even during the wrong action.<sup>23</sup>

Another theoretical possibility results from the effect of earlier assents which have shaped the person's character and memory to the extent that the person cannot, in spite of new information, avoid acting according to his old habits. The paradigmatic example of such a situation is Medea's line: 'I know what evil I propose to do, but anger rules my deliberations.' Medea knows that murder is wrong and she is conscious of this fact. She has, however, given her assent to the passion of anger for revenge for some time already. In this situation, the reasons for revenge continue to determine her deliberation. The outcome of this long-standing assent is that a later judgement and assent to the sentence 'murder is evil' cannot achieve control over the prevailing assent.

As we saw above, in the crucial passage in which Chrysippus employs the word *akratés*, he compares akratic people to runners who cannot stop running. The runners have first assented to start running, but the subsequent internal effort to stop remains beyond their control.<sup>24</sup> In this sense the Stoic theory would allow for acting against better judgement: an earlier assent which has become a habit continues to rule the deliberation even when the person arrives at a new judgement. In the cases of Medea and the runner who cannot stop running, the Stoic view of conflicting impressions leads, therefore, to a situation which resembles Aristotelian akrasia. In such a situation the reason can grasp the better course of action without accepting it. Moreover, if emotions in the Stoic theory result from mistaken judgements and display a lack of control, then akrasia appears, together with disturbing emotions.

We need not discuss further the respects in which this theoretical possibility for a genuine Stoic account of akrasia is applicable to Hellenistic Stoicism and how much

<sup>22</sup> See Gill (1983); Gosling (1990), 48–68; Sorabji (2000), 56–65; Graver (2007). Müller (2009), 155–93 presents an elaborate account of Stoic views of akrasia.

<sup>23</sup> Gosling (1990), 53–5; Knuuttila (2004), 63–8; Graver (2007), 67–9.

<sup>24</sup> Gosling (1990), 59.

support it gets from the available historical sources.<sup>25</sup> Renaissance and Reformation authors sometimes employ the verses of Euripides, but more often they depict Medea's words from Ovid's *Metamorphoses* 7, 20–21: 'I see the better and approve it, but I follow the worse.'

It is also possible to see reason and passion as complementary faculties within a single course of action. Medea's revenge is motivated by her anger, but it also involves careful rational planning. In the context of Stoicism, although anger may loosely be said to overcome reason, the individual cannot perform an action unless he or she has assented to it.<sup>26</sup> Anger does not overcome reason, but concurs with it, since Medea's elaborate revenge is preceded by clever preparation. Later Christian thinkers similarly hold that the wrong desire does not simply 'overcome' a rational person, a sinful act being preceded by a voluntary assent or consent to the persuasion of desire. It is Augustine who strengthens this link between desire and consent in Western thought.

Long before Augustine, however, the apostle Paul in Romans 7 discusses a position which bears some resemblance to Medea's conflict. Paul's discussion has been interpreted in diverse ways in the Christian Church as well as in contemporary exegetical scholarship. The ecclesiastical debates are highly dependent on Augustine's and Luther's reading of Romans 7. We will first present the contemporary view of Paul in biblical scholarship and then turn to the reception of Paul in Augustine's writings.

In Romans 7:15–20 Paul gives his classical account of human powerlessness:

I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. Now if I do what I do not want, I agree that the law is good. But in fact it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwells within me. For I know that nothing good dwells within me, that is, in my flesh. I can will what is right, but I cannot do it. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do. Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwells within me.

One basic problem of this passage is that both before and after it Paul teaches that Christians are liberated from sin. In Romans 6:22 Paul says: 'But now that you have been freed from sin and enslaved to God, the advantage you get is sanctification.' In Romans 8:2 he states: 'For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death.' How is this optimistic picture of freedom compatible with the pessimistic view of Romans 7:15–20?

The majority of contemporary biblical scholars explain this discrepancy through postulating a difference of perspectives in Romans 6–8. According to this explanation, Romans 6:22 and 8:2 describe the current, relatively optimistic situation of the Christian writer. The *ego* of Romans 7:15–20, on the other hand, does not refer to

<sup>25</sup> For Sorabji (2000), 56, Chrysippus makes 'all emotion involve akrasia', because emotion is nothing else than mistaken judgement and being out of control. For Gourinat (2007), 216, 247, this is exaggerated, but he admits that 'some texts . . . make incontinence, if not the *source* of all passions, then at least the . . . vice *dealing with passions*' (247, emphasis in original).

<sup>26</sup> See Dillon (1997), 213 and Torrance (2007).

Paul's current state, but it is employed as an 'exemplary I' which remains under the law and under sin. The conflict of the 'exemplary I' is, therefore, not experienced at the time of writing this passage. Paul is rather making a retrospective analysis: his new Christian personality now sees clearly the conflict of his former self and describes that past conflict. Moreover, the conflict described in Romans 7:15–20 was never actual and self-conscious: the person under sin did not yet understand his existence in terms of this conflict, and the Christian person now presents this analysis only in retrospect, after he has been freed from sin.<sup>27</sup>

The so-called 'new perspective on Paul', a dominant view in current biblical scholarship, adheres to this explanation, maintaining that the Christian existence is, for Paul, characterized by the freedom from sin. A competing minority position is the so-called 'Lutheran Paul', a view claiming that the situation depicted in Romans 7:15–20 remains permanently relevant for the Christian and has a deeper existential significance.<sup>28</sup> Obviously, this view also needs to explain its compatibility with other and more positive Pauline statements. An additional oddity of the 'Lutheran Paul' is its postulate that the exemplary apostle and saint would have remained permanently weak-willed, continuing to do things he hated. Augustine and Luther already struggled with this problem, as we will see below. Although the 'new perspective' postulates a relatively complex difference of perspectives, the majority of contemporary biblical scholars considers it to be a smaller interpretative problem than the awkward assumption that, for Paul, even exemplary Christians remain permanently weak-willed.

A related but distinct problem of Romans 7:15–20 concerns its historical relationship with Medea's conflict as described by Euripides and Ovid. Many scholars today think that Paul was probably familiar with the general topic of inner conflict as discussed in Hellenistic popular philosophy. They consider it unlikely, however, that Paul in Romans 7:15–20 would directly address Medea's conflict or other similar discussions available, for instance, among his contemporaries Seneca and Epictetus. Paul is rather using a common topic familiar to many of his readers.<sup>29</sup> Scholars also agree that Paul does not aim to make any conscious contribution to the Aristotelian problem of *akrasia*, but he simply illustrates the existence of humans under the power of sin with the help of the popular topic of inner conflict.<sup>30</sup>

Given this, one can still ask which concept of 'willing' Paul here presupposes. Paul's use of *thelein* does contain some features of intellectual desire, but this verb also expresses a distinct concept which is not reducible to cognitive powers. Paul's conflict

<sup>27</sup> Müller (2009), 211–15; Westerholm (2004). These two studies give an overview of exegetical literature. Engberg-Pedersen (2002) and Lichtenberger (2004) are comprehensive new studies on 'I' in Romans 7. My own view is elaborated in Saarinen (2008b).

<sup>28</sup> Westerholm (2004); see also Lichtenberger (2004).

<sup>29</sup> So Theissen (1983), 221 and Müller (2009), 216. Theissen (1983), 213–23, Hommel (1984), and Lichtenberger (2004), 166–76 have collected parallel materials from Hellenistic philosophy. They are discussed in detail by Müller (2009), 216–42.

<sup>30</sup> Müller (2009), 236; Lichtenberger (2004), 143.

between willing and doing is not portrayed as a conflict between reason and desire; this is so, because the concepts of knowledge and emotion are both embedded in the verb *thelein*. Rather, the Pauline conflict is related to the metaphysical duality of the realms of 'spirit' and 'flesh'. As 'flesh', the natural and sinful person cannot will in a manner which leads to right doing.<sup>31</sup> If we follow the 'new perspective', we may conclude that Paul is making a retrospective judgement regarding the powerlessness of all sinful people without the Holy Spirit. Such people 'will' the good and have a certain knowledge of the law, but they cannot follow their good intention in their action.

Paul's concept of 'willing' is not elaborated any closer in Romans 7:15–20. This concept contains knowledge-based and desire-based aspects, but it remains a holistic concept which denotes the fundamental direction of human aspirations without the Holy Spirit. Therefore, Paul's discussion is theological or religious rather than philosophical and it cannot be reduced to any particular philosophical theory of action. The concept of 'willing' in Romans 7:15–20 contains, therefore, elements which can be connected with different theories of action. The *ego* of Romans 7:15–20 has been interpreted in different ways both in the ecclesiastical reception of this passage and in contemporary academic scholarship. Because Romans 7:15–20 leaves room for diverse interpretations, it has fertilized different philosophical and theological theories of human action.

Augustine's writings have a formative influence on medieval philosophy and theology. This influence continues in the Renaissance and the Reformation. Petrarch, for instance, wrote his *Secretum* as a dialogue with Augustine. Martin Luther initiated his career as an Augustinian monk, and both Protestant and Catholic reformers continued to invoke Augustine for their support. The concepts of will and consent are extremely important for Augustine's philosophy of mind, but scholars continue to debate the precise meaning of these concepts.<sup>32</sup>

Augustine has often been regarded as the inventor of the free will (*voluntas libera*) or, more specifically, the free decision of the will (*liberum arbitrium voluntatis*). In my earlier study, I adopted a moderated version of this view, claiming that whereas the Aristotelians understood freedom primarily in terms of freedom from compulsion, Augustine at least sometimes conceptualizes freedom as the 'power of acting or non-acting'. In this kind of freedom, the agent, at least in principle, can choose between two or more alternatives. But Augustine is no voluntarist in the late medieval sense of the term: the will is no separate mental faculty or part of the soul, *voluntas* denoting the human psyche in its role as moral agent.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>31</sup> All these aspects are discussed by Müller (2009), 224–42, with reference to contemporary exegetical scholarship.

<sup>32</sup> Recent histories of the concept of the will include Sorabji (2000), 319–40 and Pink and Stone (eds) (2004).

<sup>33</sup> I am for the most part consistent with my portrayal of Augustine's view in Saarinen (1994), 20–43 (here: 23), but the works of Chappell (1995) and Sorabji (2000) have caused some modifications. I also relate Augustine more strongly to the concept of 'Stoic akrasia' than in my earlier work.

It can also be argued that Aristotle and Augustine share many features in action theory, both teaching that voluntary actions are uncompelled, not ignorant, and done in pursuit of perceived attainable goods. While the Greek action theory cannot admit the existence of irrational voluntary actions, however, Augustine approves this possibility, although he cannot explain it. Evil voluntary actions remain inexplicable.<sup>34</sup> Given this, one could also say that Augustine admits the possibility of akratic actions but cannot explain them. Since Augustine did not know EN VII, he does not comment on Aristotle's problems explicitly, but scholars have extensively discussed those features in Augustine's action theory which correspond to *akrasia*.<sup>35</sup>

My own earlier suggestion in this discussion was that Augustine identifies a specific category of 'reluctant actions' which he often describes by the phrase *invitus facere*, 'to do something unwillingly/reluctantly'. This category is comparable, though not identical, with Aristotle's class of akratic actions. It is employed in Augustine's famous discussion of 'two wills' (*duae voluntates*) and 'incomplete will' (*voluntas non tota/non plena*) in the eighth book of *Confessions*. A person who does something 'unwillingly' (*invito*) in this sense is nevertheless responsible for his actions and cannot be said to have acted under compulsion.<sup>36</sup>

In his autobiographical story of religious conversion, Augustine describes the will's lack of power as follows:

The mind commands the mind to will; it is not something else, yet it does not do it. What is the source of this monstrosity? What purpose does it serve? It commands, I say, that the will-act be performed, and it would not issue the command unless it willed it, yet its command is not carried out.<sup>37</sup>

Augustine explains this inability to act according to one's better judgement by holding that, in fact, two voluntary inclinations exercise an effect within the person's mind, neither of which is the 'complete' will:

But it does not will it completely, and so it does not command it completely. For it commands to the extent that it wills; and what it commands is not done, to the extent that it does not will it, since the will commands that there be a will, not another will, but its very self. So, it does not command with its whole being; therefore, its command is not fulfilled. For, if it were whole, it would not command that it be done; it would already be done. Hence, it is not a monstrosity to will something in part and to oppose it in part; it is rather an illness of the mind, which, though lifted up by truth, is also weighed down heavily by habit; so it does not rise up unimpaired. And, thus, there are two voluntary inclinations (*duae voluntates*), neither one of which is complete, and what is present in one is lacking in the other.<sup>38</sup>

<sup>34</sup> Chappell (1995), 198–201, 206–7.

<sup>35</sup> In addition to Chappell (1995), see Rubiglio (2002); Hoffmann, Müller, and Perkams (2006); Müller (2009), 301–66.

<sup>36</sup> Saarinen (1994), 20–30.

<sup>37</sup> *Confessions* 8, 9, 21. This and the following are V. J. Bourke's translations from Augustine, *Confessions* (1966).

<sup>38</sup> *Confessions* 8, 9, 21.

This passage reveals a far-reaching parallel to what we regarded above as the Stoic version of *akrasia*. A person has had a long-standing assent to a false alternative. This assent has become a habit which continues its influence even when the good judgement concerning the truth emerges. The truth ‘lifts up’ the mind, but the old habit ‘weighs it down’, thus preventing the command of the mind being fulfilled. Augustine considers that in such a situation the person has two incomplete wills. In this context, *voluntas* does not mean an effective will, but rather a desire or an impulse to do something. In *Confessions* 8, 10, Augustine describes this inner situation using several allusions to Romans 7, claiming that in some sense this inner division is involuntary, but in another sense the *ego* remains a partial subject of the different impulses concerned.

Yet it must be the case that one of the impulses actually prevails and determines the actual behaviour of the person. Augustine admits this, claiming that when one impulse is chosen, the will becomes one in its operative outlook:

Do not different wills distract the mind when a man is trying to decide what he should choose? Yet they are all good, and are at variance with each other until one is chosen. When this is done the whole united will may go forward on a single track instead of remaining as it was before, divided in many ways.<sup>39</sup>

In the ‘akratic’ case described here, this means that the will finally sticks to its old habits and cannot choose the truth. The old habits recommend the pleasures under the aspect of goodness, thus distracting the mind from the true good. Although Augustine here maintains that the will is unified in the actual choice, he admits in other contexts that one can act with less than full will.<sup>40</sup>

To understand the reception history of these passages, it is extremely important to follow the story of *Confessions* 8 to its logical conclusion. After this description, Augustine has a vision in which the virtue of Continence appears to him as the spouse of God and as the ‘fruitful mother of the children of joys’. Continence advises Augustine not to stand by his own strength but to throw himself on God’s mercy, who will heal him so that he can perform the same good actions as the children of joys.<sup>41</sup> This scene is followed by the famous episode under the fig tree where Augustine converts so that ‘there was infused in my heart something like the light of full certainty and all the gloom of doubt vanished away’.<sup>42</sup>

Earlier in *Confessions*<sup>43</sup> Augustine had quoted the Vulgate translation of the Wisdom of Solomon 8:21: ‘And I knew that I could not otherwise be continent, except God gave it.’ After the infusion of certainty, however, Augustine’s will was changed so that ‘in a single moment’ it became free of harmful passions causing the distraction:

<sup>39</sup> *Confessions* 8, 10, 24.

<sup>40</sup> *De spiritu et litera* 31, 53 (quoted below). This has been pointed out by Sorabji (2000), 316, as a friendly amendment to Saarinen (1994), 31.

<sup>41</sup> *Confessions* 8, 11, 27.

<sup>42</sup> *Confessions* 8, 12, 29.

<sup>43</sup> *Confessions* 6, 11, 20.

And this was the result: now I did not will to do what I willed, and began to will to do what thou didst will (*nolle quod volebam et velle quod volebas*). But where was my free decision during all those years and from what deep and secret retreat was it called forth in a single moment (*evocatum est in momento liberum arbitrium meum*).<sup>44</sup>

The conversion of Augustine thus effects a healing which enables him to practise the free decision and, as a result, the virtue of continence.<sup>45</sup> Augustine's use of Romans 13:13–14 in *Confessions* 8, 12, 29 underlines the liberation from harmful desires.

These passages are highly influential for the reception history for linguistic reasons: in medieval commentaries, *akrasia* and *enkrateia* came to be translated into Latin as *incontinentia* and *continentia*; the Latin terms thus had a counterpart in Augustine as well as in the Vulgate. Differences from Aristotle are also apparent: whereas *continentia* for Augustine is a major virtue which is given from above and mainly related to sexuality, Aristotle's *enkrateia* generally pertains to all half-virtuous moral states in which the good choice is followed in spite of the remaining desire to do otherwise. These differences did not, however, hinder the later expositors from establishing links between the two ancient discussions on continence.

It needs to be said in addition that these links are not merely accidental. Augustine's discussion in *Confessions* 8 displays important similarities to what we regarded above as the Stoic account of weakness of will. Augustine is concerned with the problem of controlling the different impulses which have already become a sort of inner 'will'. He further thinks that the actual choice or assent needs to be one; he also recognizes that seeing the better is not necessarily enough, since the long-standing habit weighs more than the new insight. Like Medea and the runner who cannot stop running, the storyteller of *Confessions* 8 cannot proceed to conversion, although he wishes to do so. Although Augustine's solution of this conflict situation is theological, the situation itself reveals a continuity with earlier discussions on weakness of will. The visionary appearance of Lady Continence transforms a classical philosophical problem into a theological one; at the same time, however, the designation of the remedy in terms of continence establishes a continuity from Aristotle to Augustine.

Augustine's discussion of 'two wills' is refined in some other influential writings. In *De spiritu et littera* he holds, for instance, that reluctant actions are in some sense always voluntary and the agent should therefore be held responsible for them:

Yet, on a closer analysis, it appears that even if you do a thing unwillingly (*invitus facere*), you do it by your will (*voluntate facit*) if you do it at all: you are said to do it against your will, that is, unwillingly, because you would prefer to act differently. You are compelled to act because of some evil, which it is your will to avoid or remove; and so you act under compulsion. If your will were strong enough to prefer the suffering of the evil to the doing of the act, you would of course resist the compulsion and refuse the act. Thus if you act, though it may not be with full or

<sup>44</sup> *Confessions* 9, 1, 1.

<sup>45</sup> For Augustine's notion of continence, see Schlabach (1999), as well as Augustine's work *De continentia*, dealing primarily with sexual chastity.



free will, it can never be without willing; and since the willing is carried into effect, we cannot say that the actor was powerless.<sup>46</sup>

According to this view, all acts which qualify as human acts are in some sense voluntary, although the latent tendencies to do otherwise characterize the action as reluctant. In a sense, the agent here acts with less than full will. The Augustinian terminology of internal voluntary tendencies and external voluntary acts later developed into even more sophisticated modes of conditional will (If p, then I will that q), hypothetical will (*velleitas*), willing the impossible (*voluntas impossibilis*), and second-order will (I will to will that p). These modes have been discussed in detail in recent studies.<sup>47</sup>

For the purposes of the present study, however, it is necessary to say something more about Augustine's view of consent, including its cognate terms of choice and free decision. Chappell's parallels between Aristotelian and Augustinian theories of action explain why the medieval philosophers could build innovative syntheses of the two. But, as the close reading of *Confessions* 8 indicates, Augustine is finally closer to Stoicism than to Aristotle. This closeness is particularly apparent in his view of desire and consent.

Augustine often claims that the morality of an act is dependent on the consent given to the impression and desire to perform this act.

If consent is given, then a sin is fully committed in the heart, and it is known to God, even though it be not made known to men through the medium of any act.<sup>48</sup>  
We do not commit sin in the bad desire, but in our consenting to it.<sup>49</sup>

In this sense both the desires and the external actions are morally indifferent, since the moral quality is attached to the person's intentional consent to act. With some qualifications,<sup>50</sup> this has remained the standard picture of Augustine's moral theory in Catholic theology.

This account of desire and consent is of Stoic origin. The plurality of impressions inevitably leads to a plurality of desires, but we are not fully responsible for these desires before we have given our consent to them. Unlike the full-blooded Stoics in Plutarch's description quoted above, Augustine thinks that desires are no proper judgements but preliminary ones: only the final consent is regarded as the proper judgement of the issue at hand. In this sense, Augustine is close to Origen, who holds that sensual impressions as such are beyond our control, but reason can accept some of them and reject others. One can say, therefore, that Augustine's variant of Stoicism does not approve the unity

<sup>46</sup> *De spiritu et littera* 31, 53. J. Burnaby's translation from Augustine, *Spirit* (1955).

<sup>47</sup> Saarinen (1994), 37–86. See also Rubiglio (2002) and Knuutila (2004), 205–12.

<sup>48</sup> *De sermone Domini in monte* 1, 12, 34. D. J. Havanagh's translation from Augustine, *Commentary* (1951).

<sup>49</sup> *Expositio quarundam propositionum ex Epist. ad Romanos*, PL 35, 2066.

<sup>50</sup> An important qualification concerns the so-called intrinsically evil acts which are wicked irrespectively of the agent's intention. See, e.g., the condemnation of Peter Abelard in Denzinger and Hünermann (1991), 733.

of the soul and the judgemental nature of passions as strictly as is the case in Chrysippus. While the constituents of Augustine's action theory remain those of Stoicism, namely, impression, impulse, and assent, he assumes a fairly clear distinction between impression/impulse/desire on the one hand, and assent/consent/final judgement on the other.<sup>51</sup>

Although this standard view prevails in many works by Augustine, there is some indication that he can also regard desires more strongly as proper judgements possessing moral value. In such a case, the unity of the soul is affirmed more radically and the conscious desires involve some act of consent which can be regarded as sin. This variant of Augustinianism, which is closer to the Stoicism of Chrysippus, becomes particularly apparent in the discussions regarding the sinful desire of concupiscence. This desire exists in people as a punishment for the original sin. Baptism cleanses the moral guilt caused by it, but concupiscence remains even in baptized Christians. When a Christian consents to its suggestions, he again becomes guilty of sin. In itself, however, according to the standard Catholic view, concupiscence is not yet sin but merely weakness. Only when a Christian consents to it, does it become sin.<sup>52</sup>

This clear picture is blurred by the fact that Augustine sometimes calls concupiscence a sin. These sayings gain new importance, as well as relevance for our study, when the Reformation declares that concupiscence is a sin and when the Council of Trent denies that this is the case. Augustine in some cases connects the desire of concupiscence with the judging power of reason. Concupiscence is sin, for instance, when reason learns the command not to covet and this act of learning and recognition evokes the desire. Concupiscence is likewise a sin when it contains a judgement of disobedience and rebellion against the rule of reason.<sup>53</sup> These passages affirm the view of concupiscence as judgement which in itself already involves consent. They break the twofold sequence of desire and consent, and claim in a genuinely Stoic manner that the awareness of some desires already involves proper judgement and assent. For the purposes of the present study, I will schematically distinguish<sup>54</sup> between three phases of Augustine's career, using two criteria: (1) his understanding of Paul's conflict in Romans 7; and (2) whether the concupiscence which remains in the Christian can be called sin.

(i) Young Augustine regards Romans 7 as pertaining to Paul 'under the law', that is, as a worldly person who can distinguish between good and evil. Augustine's *Confessions*

<sup>51</sup> See further Knuuttila (2004), 152–72; Sorabji (2000), 400–17; Colish (1985) II, 142–238.

<sup>52</sup> For the official promulgation of this view at the Council of Trent (1545–1563), see Walter (2001).

<sup>53</sup> See Augustinus, *Contra Iulianum opus imperfectum* 3, 210, CSEL 85/1, 503, 11–17; *Contra Iulianum* 5, 43, 8, PL 44, 787: 'concupiscentia . . . peccatum est, quia inest illi inobedientia contra dominatum mentis'; *De nuptiis et concupiscentia* 1, 23, 25, CSEL 42, 238, 3–13. See the interpretation of these passages in Markschie (2001), 100–4. Walter (2001), 268 even calls this view 'Augustinian' and labels the official Catholic view as 'scholastic'. See also Calvin, *Institutio* 3, 3, 13.

<sup>54</sup> I am indebted to Timo Nisula for insightful discussions on this matter in Augustine. Schneider and Wenz (2001) offer an overview of the theological reception of these matters. For a short *opinio communis*, see Burnell (1999). I here revise my earlier view in Saarinen (1994), 26–7.

belongs to this first period. A person under the law remains akratic: he can recognize his faults and wants to improve his conduct, but he cannot accomplish goodness with his own power, because concupiscence effectively leads him to sinful actions. After conversion, however, the new person *sub gratia* can accomplish goodness with divine help. Concupiscence remains in the person, but a Christian need not consent to its temptations. Concupiscence does not pose deep spiritual problems for the Christian existence.

(ii) After 411, however, Augustine considers that Romans 7 does not describe the akratic struggle of a worldly person, but the chapter depicts an enkratic Christian apostle who can resist and conquer concupiscence. The apostle wants to be perfect but, because of the continuing repugnance caused by concupiscence, he remains less than perfect. The speaker of Romans 7 is thus a paradigm of the good Christian, to whom concupiscence is a sparring partner or a domesticated enemy. In this second phase of 'mature Augustine', concupiscence provides continuous opportunities to sin, but cannot compel the person. The enkratic *Paulus Christianus* may complain that he is imperfect and not as free from evil desires as he wants to be, but he can relatively well resist sin.

(iii) During the late debate with Julian of Eclanum, Augustine underlines the sinfulness of remaining concupiscence more strongly than ever. This debate leads him towards a new definition of sin. Especially in his last work, *Contra Iulianum opus imperfectum* (429/430), Augustine sometimes calls concupiscence a sin and teaches that concupiscence can become operative in a compulsory manner.<sup>55</sup> Other late works, in particular *Contra Iulianum* (421/422), already contain remarks pointing to this direction. At the same time, Augustine stresses that Christians do not sin out of necessity, but concupiscence can be resisted with God's help (e.g. *Contra Iulianum* 5, 9). Even the very last writings do not, therefore, change the whole definition of sin, since the peculiar concupiscence which is sin *per se* remains a special case. But it is nevertheless remarkable that in some cases concupiscence is so strongly present in Christians that it can be called sin.<sup>56</sup>

The identification of these three phases is sufficient for our discussion of reception history. A person who wants to stress the Stoic features of Augustine's view of concupiscence can relate to the late anti-Julian writings and claim that the presence of sinful concupiscence already involves judgement and assent. Protestant Reformers

<sup>55</sup> e.g. *Contra Iulianum opus imperfectum* 5, 50 (PL 45, 1485). Müller (2009), 358 argues that the late anti-Julian Augustine moves towards a 'compatibilist' position in which a necessary action can nevertheless be intentional and in that sense free.

<sup>56</sup> Nisula (2010) presents a more detailed account of this topic. Steinmetz (1990), 308 distinguishes between three positions in the reception history of Augustine as follows: Romans 7 (1) as a description of pre-Christian existence; (2) as a description of the imperfectly just believer; (3) as a description of the justified, but imperfectly renewed, believer. Although these two classifications may differ in the closer understanding of renewal, they both aim at making visible the difference between the 'second' and the 'third' position. See also Müller (2009), 355–66 and further 3.2.

(3.2, 4.1) who emphasize the permanent sinfulness of all Christians stress the anti-Julian writings in this manner. Authors like Petrarch (2.1) discuss critically whether the pre-Christian akratic situation of Romans 7 and young Augustine is effectively overcome in religious conversion as *Confessions* claims. The standard Catholic view relies on the mature Augustine, holding that, while all Christians continue to struggle with concupiscence, the presence of this desire is not counted as sin because the person can resist its temptations and remain enkritic.<sup>57</sup> The standard Catholic view thus employs the Stoic notion of consent as the criterion of sin but does not approve the Stoic idea of emotions as judgements assented to.

Monastic and patristic authors employ two different ways of analysing the emotions. Many authors who normally affirm the standard Augustinian view of desire and consent regard the passions as being morally indifferent and beyond human control. Others claim that passions and desires already have moral value and that evil desires can be eradicated, or at least moderated, by ascetic techniques. These authors are fairly close to the Stoic treatment of desire as judgement; they also affirm the unity of mind and the ascetic ideals of life more strongly. Intermediate positions hold that while impressions and impulses are already sinful to an extent, the consent brings the sin to completion. Thus, for instance, Gregory the Great holds that ‘the seed of sin is in suggestion, the nourishment of sin in pleasure, and the maturity is in consent’.<sup>58</sup>

We may summarize our discussion on Stoicism and Augustine by introducing three heuristic models of akrasia. The ‘strictly Stoic’ model holds that emotions are judgements and the soul is one. Within the limits of this model, explanations of akrasia are difficult or even impossible, since all acts take place in accordance with the momentarily prevailing judgement. There is no conflict between different impulses, but only ‘a turning of the single reason in both directions, which we do not notice owing to the sharpness and speed of the change’, as Plutarch says.<sup>59</sup> The phenomena which look like akrasia need to be understood as actions proceeding from the momentarily prevailing judgement, or sometimes as residual effects of the so-called pre-passions.

A ‘moderated Stoic’ model holds that some distinction, although no separation, is made between the initial impressions and impulses on the one hand, and the final assent on the other. Although the impulses involve some kind of judgement and assent, later judgements may change the prevailing assent. In such a model, akrasia can be understood as the inability to change the prevailing previous assent by means of new information. The examples of Medea and Augustine’s conversion fall under this explanatory model. This model probably even allows for a clear-eyed akrasia in that

<sup>57</sup> Steinmetz (1990) has shown that, in addition to this standard view, some Catholics preferred to read Romans 7 as a description of pre-Christian existence. He also points out that, in order to understand the Protestant readings of Romans 7, one needs to distinguish between different ways of conceiving Romans 7 as a description of Christian existence.

<sup>58</sup> Gregory in Bede, *Ecclesiastical History* 1, 27, 9. Knuutilla (2004), 172–95; Saarinen (2007), 271–7.

<sup>59</sup> Long-Sedley, 412, quoting Plutarch, *On moral virtue* 446F–447A (quoted above).

the new insight is fairly clear, but the strength of the old habits continues, as in the case of the runner who cannot stop running.

A third, 'strongly moderated Stoic' or 'commonplace Augustinian' model treats desire and consent as separate faculties. Impressions and impulses/desires may represent preliminary judgements, but they emerge spontaneously and remain beyond our immediate control. One can certainly avoid the emergence of harmful desires indirectly; for instance, by not going to the circus or not smelling the food, but once the objects are perceived, the impulses are not under the will's control. Such desires do not, however, lead to action, since they are only connected with preliminary judgements, like 'this looks good/pleasant'. The decisive judgement and assent is undertaken only afterwards by reason, which freely and voluntarily consents to some impulses and rejects others. The standard Catholic view of consent as the source and criterion of moral quality exemplifies the 'commonplace Augustinian' model. In this model, akratic actions occur as voluntary consent to the wrong alternative.

In the second and third models, the harmful desires appear as pleasant and in that sense good in the preliminary judgement. The akratic person who consents to them does not, therefore, intend evil but is tempted or habituated by the seemingly good pleasure brought about by the desire. Since the commonplace Augustinian model detaches consent from the realm of impressions and impulses, the harmful desire presupposed by this model probably cannot overcome the good consent in the way this occurs in the moderated Stoic model. In order to affirm the possibility of *akrasia* and to distinguish akratic actions from other vicious conduct, commonplace Augustinianism therefore probably needs to presuppose some error or ignorance during deliberation. Thus 'clear-eyed *akrasia*' would not be possible.

The 'commonplace Augustinian' model has some affinities with so-called 'commonplace Platonism' (1.1). On closer inspection, however, the models differ considerably. In both, desires are portrayed as relatively autonomous impulses which advocate the akratic action. But while in commonplace Augustinianism rational and free consent is to be held responsible for the actual akratic decision, the commonplace Platonic model portrays the akratic action as irrational behaviour in which desire simply overcomes reason. Commonplace Platonic *akrasia* thus resembles the behaviour of passionate animals, whereas the commonplace Augustinian thinker holds that even those people who, prompted by their harmful desire, act 'unwillingly' (*invitus*), nevertheless act by their own will and are responsible for their choices.

### 1.3 Medieval Aristotelians: Thomas Aquinas and Walter Burley

Robert Grosseteste translated EN in its entirety into Latin in 1246–1247. He added an anonymous Latin commentary on EN VII and some expository notes of his own to his translation, among other texts. Before that, already some details on EN VII were

known through the Arabic reception of Aristotle, for instance, the so-called *Summa Alexandrinorum*. Averroes's commentary on EN was translated into Latin in 1240.<sup>60</sup> The first Western commentaries of Albert the Great and Thomas Aquinas were of decisive importance for the philosophical and theological reception of EN VII. We will return to Albert in 1.5 below.

The works of Thomas Aquinas were not only important for the medieval period, but they continued their formative influence through the Renaissance and the Reformation. Thomas's commentary on the EN, *Sententia libri Ethicorum*, follows Aristotle's text closely and expounds it literally, remaining true to the teachings of the philosopher.<sup>61</sup> At times this makes Aquinas's commentary uninteresting, because his own contribution seems to be lacking. This feature has not hindered the enormous popularity of the work. As we shall see, many Renaissance commentaries continue to follow in the footsteps of the *doctor communis*.

According to Thomas's exposition of EN 1147b9–17, the akratic person fails to use the singular proposition of the practical syllogism. Since passion can confuse our senses so that we do not grasp the particular facts properly, akrasia is due to ignorance in the sense of our Aristotelian model 1a. In keeping with this explanation, Thomas holds that the akratic person does not act by choice. On the other hand, Thomas also says that the akratic person has a transitory false evaluation (*aestimatio falsa*) which prompts the akratic action. This indicates that the akratic person in some sense consents to the misguided action.<sup>62</sup>

The theological works of Aquinas, in particular *De malo* and *Summa theologiae*, explain akratic action in a manner which departs more strongly from Aristotle and approaches the Augustinian view of consent to the wrong alternative. In *De malo*, Aquinas maintains that although the akratic person does not sin 'from choice' (*ex electione*), he nevertheless sins 'while choosing' (*eligens*). In *Summa theologiae* he says that the akratic person 'chooses to follow' evil passions (*eligit sequi eas*). The moral responsibility and the moral guilt of the akratic person are thus clearly indicated in the theological works.<sup>63</sup>

The basic problem in the reception history of Aquinas's akrasia is, therefore, whether the later Thomists follow the Aristotelian *Sententia* or the more Augustinian theological works and, perhaps more importantly, whether these emphases can be reconciled. In

<sup>60</sup> See Saarinen (1994), 87–94. For *Summa Alexandrinorum*, see Fidora (2006).

<sup>61</sup> For Thomas's ethics in general, see Pope (2002). Doig (2001) is a study of *Sententia libri Ethicorum* (= *Ethica*). Thomas's view of akrasia has been treated in Kent (1989); Saarinen (1994), 118–30; Saarinen (2003); Hoffmann (2006); Bradley (2008) (with an extensive bibliography) and Müller (2009), 512–46.

<sup>62</sup> Thomas, *Ethica*, ed. Leonina, 393, 310–27. For the different expressions of choice, see Saarinen (1994), 118–20. A new and very careful discussion is Bradley (2008), who holds that 'in Aquinas's reading, Aristotle hews closely to the Socratic line and only allows for unknowing or "closed-eyed akrasia"' (p. 97).

<sup>63</sup> *De malo* q3 a12 ad11. *Summa theologiae* II/2 q155 a3. Saarinen (1994), 121–5. Bradley (2008), 98–9 says that 'in his mature works, Aquinas definitely transposes . . . the Aristotelian discussion of akrasia to the plane of will', quoting *De malo* q2 a3 ad 5: 'Principaliter autem est peccatum in voluntate secundum quod malae concupiscentiae consentit.'

my earlier study<sup>64</sup> I argued for a fairly Aristotelian synthesis as follows: in his discussion on *akrasia*, Thomas presupposes two practical syllogisms, one persuading the agent, the other forbidding. For instance:

*Persuading:*

Everything sweet is pleasant and pleasure should  
be pursued

This is sweet

*It follows that:*

This is pursued

*Forbidding:*

Nothing sweet should be tasted out  
of season

(At present is out of season)

The harmful passion cannot directly obscure the major premises, but it can obscure one of the minor ones, in this case the one in brackets. Given this, the forbidding major loses its dynamic force because it is not found to be relevant in the prevailing circumstances. In such a situation the deliberation is shifted to the persuading syllogism, which is found to be more relevant in this case. This shift does not occur ‘from choice’ (*non ex electione*), because it is part of the deliberation. Its being wrong or erroneous is due to ignorance in the sense of the Aristotelian model 1a. However, the persuading syllogism which leads to sinful action is followed with choice (*eligens, secundum electionem*). The akratic action thus presupposes ignorance, but this also involves the wrong choice, according to which the harmful action is performed. In this sense the akratic person can be said not to act ‘from choice’ but nevertheless voluntarily and with choice.

It is therefore theoretically possible to reconcile the Aristotelian view of Thomas’s commentary with the more Augustinian view which prevails in his theological works. This ‘two-step’ model of *akrasia* is very close to Aristotelian model 1a, because the practical syllogism directs the emergence of human action and because *akrasia* is explained in terms of ignorance of the minor premise. Thomas’s model also involves some Augustinian features of voluntary consent to the wrong alternative, as well as aspects of Augustine’s inner struggle between ‘two wills’ (cf. 2.2 below).

New studies on Aquinas’s view of *akrasia* have refined this ‘two-step’ model. Denis Bradley argues that Thomas claims in *Sententia libri Ethicorum* that the akratic agent must actively consent to concupiscence before acting from concupiscence.<sup>65</sup> This choice is not, however, ‘deliberate’ (*ex electione*). In keeping with this idea of consent, the akratic person does not act ‘from ignorance’ (*propter ignorantiam*), although he acts ‘in ignorance’ (*ignorans*) of the particular premise. This latter ignorance is a ‘vincible ignorance’ and, since the akratês does not overcome it, he is in some sense culpable: ‘by

<sup>64</sup> The following summarizes my earlier account in Saarinen (1994), 125–9. For later scholarly discussion on this, see Pasnau (2002), 241–52; Irwin (2006), 50–8; Hoffmann (2006) and, in particular, the detailed account of Bradley (2008).

<sup>65</sup> Bradley (2008), 98, referring to *Ethica*, ed. Leonina. 315a, 154–63.

volitionally consenting to passion, which consent *follows upon* an erroneous judgement of reason, the incontinent man makes a bad choice. . . . The *incontinens* chooses to be in a state of ignorance by freely choosing to follow rather than resist the inordinate inclinations of his sensible appetite'.<sup>66</sup>

Although Aquinas imports an Augustinian view of consent into Aristotle's notion of choice in this way, his view of akrasia remains fairly close to Aristotle's in the sense of our model 1a. Like Aquinas, Aristotle regards the akratic person as culpable, although he can be more easily forgiven than the wicked or intemperate person. Given the dominance of Augustinian theology in medieval Latin Christianity, Aquinas's real contribution consists in his ability to understand Aristotle's akrasia in precise terms and in his adherence to the explanation which regards ignorance of the particular circumstances as the root cause of acting against one's own better judgement.

Aquinas can competently discuss the various Aristotelian subspecies of akrasia (see 1.1) and relate them to different theological topics.<sup>67</sup> Aquinas's theories of perception and practical deliberation can be further refined by concentrating on the so-called 'parts of prudence', among which *eubulia* (EN 1142b32–35) deals with good deliberation and *synesis* (1143a6–15) with a good capacity to judge the particulars perceived. Sense perception is connected with the judgement expressed in the minor premise of the practical syllogism not only in Stoicism but also in the Aristotelian theory.<sup>68</sup>

Most medieval commentaries on EN are Aristotelian in their emphasis that some ignorance must precede akratic actions and that the process of deliberation is presented in terms of a practical syllogism. The commentators normally think that what they present as the Aristotelian view is a philosophically true description of the matters in question. In spite of these similarities, however, their actual expositions of Aristotle's view differ considerably. It seems that individual and innovative views were rewarded in medieval teaching.<sup>69</sup>

Walter Burley's *Expositio super decem libros Ethicorum Aristotelis* is a good example of a commentary which follows Aquinas, but deviates from him in some crucial passages. With regard to akrasia, this strategy is both fascinating and puzzling, and has evoked some scholarly debate.<sup>70</sup> Paraphrasing Aquinas's commentary, Burley first claims that the akratic person is ignorant of particular circumstances in the sense of our model 1a. After the exposition of EN 1147b9–18, however, he adds a note saying that

the proposition with regard to which the akratic person is deceived and of which he is ignorant, is not the minor premise of the practical syllogism, but the conclusion of the practical syllogism. Let us consider for instance the following practical syllogism: nothing sweet ought to be tasted, this is

<sup>66</sup> Bradley (2008), 104.

<sup>67</sup> Hoffmann (2006) and Bradley (2008) discuss these in detail.

<sup>68</sup> See Saarinen (2003).

<sup>69</sup> Courtenay (1987), 191.

<sup>70</sup> See Saarinen (1994), 131–46; Wood (1999) and Saarinen (1999) discuss the topic further.



sweet, therefore this should not be tasted. Now, the akratic person is not deceived in regard to the minor premise, since he knows well enough that this is sweet. But he is deceived with regard to the conclusion which he does not actually know because of vehement concupiscence.<sup>71</sup>

This quote offers clear evidence that the so-called Aristotelian model 2 was known in the medieval period. Burley thinks that it is possible to formulate a propositional conclusion and that Aristotle refers to it as the ‘last protasis’. Burley also takes very seriously Aristotle’s claim that the akratês has a good choice; according to Burley, the incontinent person is prevented from ‘executing’ this choice.

Burley is further interested in parallels between the practical syllogism and logic in general. Following a suggestion made in Averroes’ commentary on EN, he remarks that the akratic person who knows both premises

can be ignorant of the conclusion and be deceived with regard to it. This occurs when he does not actually put the premises together in order to reach the conclusion. But when he does actually put the premises together, aiming at the conclusion, it is not possible to know the premises and ignore the conclusion.<sup>72</sup>

In this connection Burley quotes Aristotle’s description of a similar logical error from *Analytica posteriora* (71a21). Averroes and Burley are thus aware of the Aristotelian explanatory model 1b.

Burley does not state unequivocally which solution he himself prefers. According to Rega Wood, Burley explores ‘different ways in which to introduce indeterminacy into the intellect’.<sup>73</sup> This conclusion means that Burley is even more intellectualist than Thomas in locating the root cause of akrasia in the failures of our intellectual grasp of the facts. Burley does not stress the role of consent, stating in a truly Aristotelian manner that the akratês has a good choice. For the purpose of our interpretation history, it is important to see that all three Aristotelian explanatory models (1a, 1b, and 2) are present in medieval discussion and that akrasia is often expounded in a truly Aristotelian fashion in the medieval commentaries, without recourse to the Augustinian notions of free will and consent.

## 1.4 Medieval Voluntarists: Walter of Bruges and Henry of Ghent

Augustine’s writings remain fundamental for all medieval Latin philosophers and theologians, but the church father’s theory of the will also becomes a point from which two different ways depart. Thomas chooses the Aristotelian way and embeds Augustine’s view of consent into the broader framework of the practical syllogism. Taking the other way, many Franciscan theologians highlight the freedom of the will

<sup>71</sup> Burley, *Super Ethicorum*, 121 va. Cf. Saarinen (1994), 137–8.

<sup>72</sup> *Super Ethicorum*, 121va. Saarinen (1994), 139.

<sup>73</sup> Wood (1999), 80.

and consider Augustine's views to be in conflict with Aristotle, developing a voluntarism which applies but also extends the framework of Augustine's thought.<sup>74</sup>

The voluntarist approach is less visible in the commentaries on EN. The first Franciscan commentator, Geraldus Odonis, can be regarded as being fairly Aristotelian.<sup>75</sup> John Buridan, who shares many of the new philosophical presuppositions of the voluntarists, nevertheless expounds Aristotle's ethics in a fairly Augustinian and intellectualist fashion (see 1.5). The Franciscans do, however, comment on Aristotle's *akrasia* in their other writings. These texts reveal the voluntarist stance which sets out to explain incontinent action in terms of wilful neglect rather than ignorance. For many thinkers of this leaning, in particular Walter of Bruges, Henry of Ghent, and Peter Olivi, the mutual relationship between will and intellect is one between king and advisor. Although the ruler needs information and advice, he sovereignly decides what is to be done.<sup>76</sup>

Such a voluntarist image of the mind departs from both Aristotelianism and Stoicism. The free and sovereign will now becomes a reified faculty to which other mental faculties relate as auxiliaries. Reason in particular is regarded as a servant holding the lamp in the darkness so that the master can see, but it is the master, the will, which actually commands the lamp-holder.<sup>77</sup> The will possesses a capacity of self-determination. Although Augustine's view of the 'free decision' (*liberum arbitrium voluntatis*) probably contains the germ of this development, Augustine never reified the faculty of the will in the autonomous manner of the medieval voluntarists.<sup>78</sup>

In his *Quaestiones disputatae*, Walter of Bruges shows that he knows Aristotle's discussion on incontinence well. He is not satisfied with the Aristotelian and Thomist view of ignorance related to *akrasia*, claiming that the incontinent sinner has a 'sufficient' knowledge of what should be done. If there is some lack of knowledge, it is only because the *akratês* does not want to have this knowledge and so sins voluntarily.<sup>79</sup> The incontinent act is thus due to voluntary negligence. Walter aims to underline the responsibility and culpability of the *akratic* person.

At the same time, the will in Walter's view does not will evil as such, always choosing an option which is in some way good. Thus incorrect choices are always willed in some way *sub ratione boni*, under the aspect of goodness. This view means, as

<sup>74</sup> See Stadter (1971); Kent (1995); Kobusch (2006).

<sup>75</sup> For Odonis, see Kent (1984) and Saarinen (1994), 146–61.

<sup>76</sup> Kent (1995), 116–29 and Kobusch (2006), 250–3 discuss the 'imperial will' in detail.

<sup>77</sup> Kobusch (2006), 251, quoting Richard of Mediavilla, *In II Sent.* d38 a2 q4, and Henry of Ghent, *Quodlibet* I q14, 90.

<sup>78</sup> Here I side with Chappell (1995) and distinguish myself from Dihle (1982). Sorabji (2000), 319–40 offers a balanced account.

<sup>79</sup> Kobusch (2006), 253, quoting Walter, *Quaestiones disputatae* q4 ad11 p. 45: 'incontinsens habet sufficientem scientiam ad iudicandum sibi apparens bonum esse malum et esse vitandum; scit enim in universali omnem fornicationem esse malam et vitandam; ex quo concludere posset, si vellet, etiam sibi esse malam et vitandam, et ideo non caret scientia nisi quia vult, propter quod voluntarie peccat.' See also Müller (2009), 559–65.

Bonnie Kent has pointed out,<sup>80</sup> an important departure from Aristotle's ethics in which all alternatives but one are eliminated in the course of deliberation. The view that various alternatives continue to appear *sub ratione boni* is closer to the Stoic and Augustinian theories of action in which the various impressions can evoke different preliminary desires and temptations.

In keeping with this idea, Walter describes the wrong choice as follows:

When the will acts by choosing what is evil or choosing to do nothing or to do what is less good, it wills for the sake of something better, which it itself decides is better at that time, as Adam did—not absolutely, nor having some passion that blinded reason, as the intemperate has, nor even having a passion that would incline appetite to movement and take away judgement in the particular proposition, which happens in the incontinent, as is evident in Book VII of the *Ethics*; but it was decided only by the freedom of the will in commanding reason that it would be better for him to eat from the forbidden fruit tree, against God's command, than to cause his wife's displeasure.<sup>81</sup>

For Walter, the dominance of will over reason is so strong that the free will can shape reason's judgement to make the desired course of action appear better than its alternatives. Their appearance *sub ratione boni* is thus affected by the will's commanding power.

The example of Adam is important, since Adam was considered to have lived in paradise without passions. Thus his acting against better judgement is not due to passion, but is caused by the free will, which in paradise appears to have existed completely detached from desires and impulses. Henry of Ghent also taught that the first man acted directly, without any interference of the passion, against the judgement of right reason.<sup>82</sup> The free will thus enabled a 'clear-eyed akrasia' in the case of Adam. Although fallen humankind cannot exercise free will without the interference of the passions, the faculty of the will is so independent that it cannot be located in the realm of Stoic impulses nor in the animal or rational soul of Aristotelianism. For Walter and Henry, Adam's freedom depicts a sovereignty which exists in addition to the ancient conceptions of freedom. Although Adam's impassionate will can decide in itself which is the better alternative, it must will under the aspect of goodness.

Henry of Ghent presents a thoroughly voluntaristic reading of incontinence in his *Quodlibeta*. Even for a strict voluntarist like Henry akrasia is not a self-evident phenomenon, but a reality which needs to be spelled out carefully in order to refute the Socratic-Aristotelian misunderstandings of the issue.<sup>83</sup> Henry's basic position is that weakness of will is accompanied by some disorder or ignorance in the intellect. This

<sup>80</sup> Kent (1995), 174.

<sup>81</sup> Walter, *Quaestiones disputatae* q6 ad14, translation from Kent (1995), 176.

<sup>82</sup> See Kent (1995), 179, quoting Henry, *Quodlibet* V, 128–9.

<sup>83</sup> In addition to Kent (1995) and Kobusch (2006), Henry's view of akrasia has been studied in detail by Müller (2007) and (2009), 569–616.

ignorance is not, however, the cause of akrasia, but vice versa, since the corruption of the will affects the intellect so that it becomes disordered.

For Henry, the incontinent person slides into his or her akratic action gradually. The stages of this slide are fairly Augustinian. First, the person is tempted by pleasure. Second, his or her will consents to the temptation. Third, some forgetting occurs in the reason. Fourth, the will proceeds to the sinful action.<sup>84</sup> The act of consent is free and voluntary in that the akratic person could have prevented it. Even during the third stage, the akratic will could still revise its course, since reason does not exercise any positive causality in the process. Only after the third stage does the so-called *consensus perfectus* determine the course of action. After the third stage, the

sinful action can be said to take place necessarily, since the person has through his consent lost both the use of free decision in the will and the use of right reason in the intellect.<sup>85</sup>

This analysis of akratic action presupposes that the will consents to something which is presented to it under the aspect of goodness (*sub ratione boni*), that is, pleasure. A free will is a rational appetite which does not will wickedly for the sake of wickedness but it can will the seemingly good aspects of the wrong option. Because the process of akrasia is directed by the will and increases gradually, clear-eyed akrasia is possible only in the qualified sense that the free act of the will is not a priori conditioned by ignorance. The consent to the temptation, however, inevitably brings about some ignorance in the intellect. This is voluntary ignorance caused by the will's consent, which occurs a posteriori but immediately and is thus simultaneous with the disorder of the will. The akratic action is thus accompanied by some ignorance and is not clear-eyed.<sup>86</sup>

Henry's view is to some extent conditioned by external reasons. At the University of Paris, a condemnation was pronounced in 1277 which obligated the teachers to defend free will. At the same time, another declaration was approved, namely the so-called *propositio magistralis*, according to which 'there is no evil in the will unless there is error or some lack of knowledge in reason'.<sup>87</sup> Henry shows the sense in which one can affirm this proposition without subscribing to the Aristotelian-Thomist view of ignorance as the cause of evil.

Akrasia thus remained a prominent topic of discussion even in the voluntarist branch of scholasticism. Recent studies ask whether the Socratic intellectualism was 'pushed out of the front door only to be let in at the back'.<sup>88</sup> Although voluntarists like

<sup>84</sup> Müller (2007), 10, quoting Henry, *Quodlibet* I, 141–3.

<sup>85</sup> Müller (2007), 11. Henry, *Quodlibet* I, 143: 'Nec est aliquid inconveniens voluntatem sic necessitari in actum peccati, postquam per consensum amisit usum liberi arbitrii in voluntate, sicut rationis rectae in intellectu.'

<sup>86</sup> Kent (1995), 180–1; Müller (2007), 12–15.

<sup>87</sup> For this sentence, attributed to Giles of Rome, see Kent (1995), 79–81, and Müller (2007), 12–15. For the content and reception of the Parisian articles of 1277, see Hissette (1977).

<sup>88</sup> So Kent (1995), 180; cf. Müller (2007), 22.

Walter of Bruges and Henry of Ghent set out to defend free will and moral responsibility, they understand the will as rational appetite which is directed to its objects only when they appear under the aspect of goodness. Although the will is self-determining and can command the intellect, it is also in itself a cognitive and rational faculty and in that sense not fundamentally different from reason. Neither Walter nor Henry teach ‘deliberate irrationality’, that is, a view which would detach the will from being rational or the most noble part of the soul. Only if free will was separated from cognitive powers could it choose anything that happens to be available, but voluntarists normally do want the will to be the most noble part of the soul, a view which embraces rationality rather than rejects it.

If Aristotle’s *akrasia* exemplifies the mysterious inability of reason to control action, the voluntarist version exemplifies the mysterious corruption of free will after the emergence of misguided consent. For Henry, consent to temptation resembles the act of selling oneself into slavery: once consent is given, free decision and right reason are lost. Voluntarist *akrasia* is due to a free decision, but this decision cannot be reversed. Consent to temptation brings about a state of ignorance and necessity in which the operative control is lost. Thus the voluntarist account in some ways resembles the intellectualist accounts it sets out to oppose.

In spite of these similarities, the voluntarists proceed on that Augustinian way which emphasizes the will’s self-determination and leads away from Aristotelian models. They celebrate free will as the highest faculty of the soul. This view of the will is different from the Aristotelian tradition, since it also develops the Augustinian view of consent in a new direction. Concerning *akrasia* in particular, the use of Adam’s fall as an example is one of the most radical innovations. The role of passions is effectively bracketed by employing Adam as the paradigmatic example and proof of the will’s capacity to act against better judgement. In all earlier accounts of *akrasia*, passions play a major role. We may designate ‘Adam’s *akrasia*’ as a case in which the person acts against his or her own better judgement so that no passions are involved. Walter and Henry discuss this case in the context of *akrasia*, but Adam is for them not an example of Aristotle’s *akrasia* but of how a person can go wrong in a clear-eyed manner.

Henry’s description of the successive degrees of *akrasia* imitates the Catholic narrative of the Fall. The Fall is not caused by Adam’s ignorance or his passions, but the causality is reversed: Adam’s subsequent fallen state is characterized by ignorance and harmful passions which emerge as effects and even punishments of consent to the wrong alternative. Adam could sin freely, but after the Fall he cannot avoid being and remaining a sinner. Adam exemplifies the kind of *akrasia* in which ignorance and passions belong to the consequences of one’s acting against one’s better judgement.

## 1.5 Medieval Syntheses: Albert the Great and John Buridan

Some prominent medieval thinkers in addition to the Aristotelians and the voluntarists attempted to outline a middle way which would integrate the best of the ancient traditions and reconcile them with one another. Albert the Great's commentaries on EN harmonize Aristotle's teachings with the rest of ancient philosophy as well as with Augustinian Christianity.<sup>89</sup> Since the commentaries were written between 1248 and 1267, that is, before the controversies between Thomist intellectualists and Franciscan voluntarists began, Albert's considerations are not inhibited by later doctrinal condemnations. His commentaries had broad influence; among others, Aquinas, Burley, and John Buridan use them extensively.<sup>90</sup> For the purposes of our reception history, the line from Albert to Buridan is instructive, since it establishes a third distinct type of medieval akrasia. We will treat Albert's extensive discussions only insofar as this succession is relevant.

Albert is well aware of Aristotle's intentions and sympathetic to them for the most part. In his first commentary, he claims that the basic explanation of akratic action can be given by maintaining that the incontinent person does not know the minor premise in its full sense. The minor premise is corrupted by passion. Socrates is right in saying that no one violates his own knowledge insofar as the universal knowledge of the major premises is concerned.<sup>91</sup> In this way Albert adheres to model 1a.

In his second commentary, Albert defends the same position in principle. Now, however, he introduces the Stoic-Augustinian concept of acceptance (*acceptio*) more strongly into the context of explaining akrasia. Albert concludes that

in the syllogism of the continent person the last or minor premise and opinion, or the sensual acceptance, is accepted under the affection which qualifies the senses. This minor premise is the ruling principle in our action and work, for all our actions are related to particular concrete situations. As long as the incontinent person suffers the passion of concupiscence, he either does not have this sensual acceptance, or he has it in such way that in such a disposition he cannot truly be said to know rightly what should be done.<sup>92</sup>

On the one hand, this passage indicates the solution that something is wrong with the minor premise (1a). The word 'acceptance', on the other hand, introduces some Stoic-Augustinian features into the syllogistic picture.

<sup>89</sup> For Albert's ethics, see in particular Müller (2001). For Albert's akrasia, see Saarinen (1994), 94–118; Tracey (2006); Müller (2006).

<sup>90</sup> Albert, *Ethica* I, *Ethica* II. Saarinen (1994), 94–6. Walsh (1975), 258 documents the use of Albert in Burley and Buridan. They refer to *Ethica* II, whereas Aquinas uses *Ethica* I; see Gauthier (1969) and Müller (2001).

<sup>91</sup> Saarinen (1994), 113–14, quoting *Ethica* I, 532–3.

<sup>92</sup> *Ethica* II, 476; Saarinen (1994), 114.

In this context, Albert claims that ‘contrary acceptances’ reside in the soul of the continent person who thinks, for instance, that this act is both pleasant and shameful, and therefore inclines towards both committing and avoiding the act in question. Cicero, for instance, uses *acceptio* in the sense of Stoic assent, and it is evident that Albert understands the word to mean a preliminary assent or consent to the action in question. He compares acceptance with an opinion; thus acceptance expresses a judgement which is assented to but which does not yet prompt action. Albert further argues that continent and incontinent actions involve ‘not one potency but two’, since concupiscence exercises the power towards the pleasant while reason tries to avoid the shameful. The incontinent person has ‘contrary acceptances’ in his mind.<sup>93</sup> This state of affairs is Aristotelian, but Albert’s understanding of it is ‘clearly modelled on Augustine’s “two wills” which compete with one another’.<sup>94</sup> Augustine’s description of inner struggle is thus introduced into the Aristotelian framework. Albert’s pupil Thomas Aquinas recognizes some aspects of this struggle; we will return to them in 2.2 below.

Unlike later voluntarists, Albert does not introduce the term ‘acceptance’ in order to stress the voluntary nature of akratic action. He follows the Aristotelian explanation, insisting that concupiscence obscures right reason and thus enables the execution of akratic action. Akrasia is thus due to ignorance. After the action, concupiscence dissolves and the person can again see clearly and fully what he should have done. Akrasia resembles the state of sleep or drunkenness, during which the person cannot control his or her actions.<sup>95</sup> The Aristotelian model 1a thus prevails.

In both of his commentaries, Albert is interested in the problem of moral certainty. Aristotle’s word *akribēia*, ‘precision’, was translated into Latin as *certitudo*, ‘certainty’. Aristotle’s remark that we cannot reach the same degree of precision in ethics as in mathematics (EN 1094b2527, 1104a1–6) led Albert to emphasize that we cannot achieve absolute certainty in ethics. In addition, the singular terms of minor premises always report on contingent matters which may be otherwise. Whereas the Aristotelian *scientia* has as its object things which cannot be otherwise (EN 1139b), akratic actions deal with the estimation and acceptance of contingent and uncertain matters. Albert presents these remarks on moral uncertainty in a somewhat unsystematic fashion,<sup>96</sup> but they are of great importance in the ethics of John Buridan.

Buridan’s *Quaestiones super decem libros Ethicorum* can be regarded as the richest harvest of medieval Aristotelian ethics. Buridan knows Aquinas, but he mentions

<sup>93</sup> *Ethica* II, 474–5; Saarinen (1994), 115–16. As Rist (1969), 140 points out, Cicero uses *acceptio* in the sense of Stoic assent.

<sup>94</sup> So Müller (2006), 1312. He provides extensive information of Albert’s relationship to Augustine in Müller (2001); (2006); (2009), 503–11.

<sup>95</sup> *Ethica* II, 476: ‘Si autem aliquis quaerat, qualiter in incontinente resolvitur ignorantia quae est ex obnubilatione concupiscentiae, ita quod incontinens rursus fiat sciens et claram habeat acceptionem operabilium. Eadem ratio est quae est de vinolento et dormiente: haec enim passio propriam et separatam ab aliis non habet causam. Hanc autem causam a Physiologis audire oportet, quia ex principiis ethicis non potest determinari.’ Cf. Saarinen (1994), 116.

<sup>96</sup> *Ethica* I, 522–3, 530; *Ethica* II, 51–4, 408, 465–7. See Saarinen (1994), 103–12.

Albert more often. Among Franciscan authors, he uses Gerald Odonis in particular. Buridan's discussion on akrasia is an attempt to delineate a middle way between intellectualists and voluntarists. He uses Seneca in particular among the Stoics. Buridan avoids theological issues and does not often quote Augustine, but he pays special attention to his own agreement with the above-mentioned Parisian articles which defend medieval Augustinianism.<sup>97</sup>

Buridan's action theory is a synthesis of Stoic, Augustinian, voluntarist, and Albertian elements. In his view, the self-determination of the will must be affirmed, although it may not be possible to present sufficient rational grounds for the so-called *libertas oppositionis*, the self-regulating capacity of the will, to be determined (everything else being equally disposed) sometimes towards one of the opposites and sometimes to the other.<sup>98</sup> In addition, Buridan affirms the Parisian article which holds that the will can remain in the state of *non velle* in situations in which it is natural for it to be moved.<sup>99</sup> In other words, the will exercises control over the immediate impulses of the animal soul.

In spite of these affirmations, Buridan is not a straightforward voluntarist in the style of Walter of Bruges or Henry of Ghent. He teaches that the will is prepared to action through three stages. The will first receives a judgement of the practical intellect, informing it of various good and bad aspects of the alternatives under consideration. This preliminary judgement does not prompt action but only generates an act of 'complacence' or 'displacence' in the will. It is possible to introduce many different acts of complacence and displacence simultaneously, given that the practical intellect judges that different aspects of the situation at hand appear as under the aspect of goodness or badness (*sub ratione boni/mali*). The cluster of first acts is followed by the second act of the will which is the actual acceptance or refusal (*acceptatio, refutatio*). This act is more specific than Albert's *acceptio*, since the will only accepts one alternative, which is considered to be the best among the candidates introduced by the first act. The second act is in many respects similar to Augustine's consent. But while in the voluntarist tradition the act of consent demonstrates the freedom of the will, Buridan's second act of the will occurs on the basis of accomplished intellectual deliberation. The second act prompts the action if no external hindrance is present. The third act of the will is the action itself (*prosecutio, fuga*).<sup>100</sup>

Buridan's theory applies some Stoic features. It understands that the first act of the will, the desire to do something, occurs in the form of judgement. Although Buridan applies the Aristotelian idea of practical deliberation and syllogistic reasoning, his description of the first acts of the will resembles the Stoic view in which the agent is

<sup>97</sup> For Buridan's ethics and action theory, see Krieger (1986); Saarinen (1994), 161–88; Saarinen (2003); Lagerlund (2002); Zupko (2003), 227–70. Pironet (2001) is a valuable electronic edition and commentary. In the following, references are first given to Buridan (1513) and second, in brackets, to Buridan (1637).

<sup>98</sup> Saarinen (1994), 166–7, referring to Buridan, *Quaestiones*, lib III, q1, 36rb, 37rb–va (147–8, 152–3).

<sup>99</sup> *Quaestiones*, 36vb (149). Saarinen (1994), 168. Müller (2009), 692 holds that Buridan takes the topic of *non velle* from Duns Scotus. For Duns Scotus's view of akrasia, see Müller (2009), 636–72.

<sup>100</sup> *Quaestiones*, lib. III q3, 41va–43ra (165–71). Saarinen (1994), 169–70.



confronted with different and contrary impressions and impulses. In order to make a definitive choice between them, an act of assent is needed. This second act is different from the preliminary judgements and preliminary desires, equipping the will with the freedom of not accepting the seemingly good and not refuting the seemingly bad.<sup>101</sup> Buridan is, however, an Aristotelian intellectualist in the sense that he believes in the discerning capacity of practical reasoning between the first and the second acts of the will. His analysis of akrasia shows this in a paradigmatic manner.

The akratic conduct occurs in a situation which is characterized by a 'twofold inclination' (*duplex inclinatio*); that is, a situation in which the person successively inclines towards contrary alternatives. Incontinence is primarily located in the will, because it is the faculty of the soul which can first exercise a choice towards one alternative and then to its contrary.<sup>102</sup> Although the different first acts of the will can exemplify different preliminary judgements, Buridan defends the final unity of judgement and assent. He therefore refutes the view that a person could, strictly speaking, simultaneously have contrary judgements about a particular action. Even in the case of the incontinent person this does not happen, since

the incontinent moves toward contrary positions as follows: when he is not under the influence of passion, his appetite inclines towards avoiding wrong, whereas under the influence of passion it inclines towards pursuing it. But it does not have both inclinations at once. It can also be said that the intellect judges simultaneously that one and the same thing is both pleasant and shameful. Given this, the appetite immediately receives both complacency toward it because of pleasure, and displacence because of shamefulness. In this sense, complacency and displacence are not opposites. But as the intellect cannot judge that this totality must be both followed and avoided simultaneously, so the appetite cannot both accept and refute this totality simultaneously.<sup>103</sup>

Buridan is both Stoic and Aristotelian in his emphasis on the unity of the judgement. Although the first act of the will can generate different and contrary viewpoints which are judgemental since they appear *sub ratione boni/mali*, the complete situation will finally be judged in a unified manner. This is expressed in the second act of the will which prompts action. The second act is not, however, a voluntarist manifestation of freedom, but an intellectualistic affirmation of the best option. Buridan underlines this intellectualist stance in his decisive questions regarding akrasia. In his view, since it is not possible to act against actual, particular, and perfect knowledge, akrasia is accompanied by some ignorance. He further holds that the will necessarily obeys the conclusion of the practical intellect, if this conclusion is argued with full clarity and certainty.<sup>104</sup>

<sup>101</sup> *Quaestiones*, 42 va (169): 'est sciendum, quod libertas secundum quam voluntas potest non acceptare, quod sibi presentatum fuerit sub ratione boni, vel non refutare quod sibi presentatum est sub ratione mali, prodest valde nobis in vitae directionem.' See further Saarinen (1994), 171.

<sup>102</sup> *Quaestiones*, lib. VII q3, 141ra–va (576–8). Saarinen (1994), 172–3.

<sup>103</sup> *Quaestiones*, lib. VII q6, 143va (587). Saarinen (1994), 174–5.

<sup>104</sup> See Saarinen (1994), 178–81, discussing *Quaestiones*, lib. VII q7–8.

Given that Buridan also believes in the self-determination of the will and in the *libertas oppositionis*, these are somewhat puzzling conclusions. Buridan evidently thinks that he can combine the requirements of Franciscan voluntarism and Thomist intellectualism. This combination is achieved with the help of two additional postulates: (1) the uncertainty of moral situations, and (2) the ability of the will to withhold the implementation of judgement in uncertain cases. For Buridan, akrasia is a common phenomenon which results from uncertain situations. A person need not implement better judgement, if that judgement remains uncertain and its alternative also appears under the aspect of some goodness.

In discussing akrasia, Buridan undertakes a distinction among four different grades of how the intellect can estimate the truth of its own judgement. (1) The weakest case arises when no reason supports either A or B. (2) Another weak case arises when equal reasons support both A and B. (3) In the third case, there is a stronger reason for A than for B, but some reason nevertheless promotes B. (4) Only when all doubts are removed can the intellect reach a judgement which is neither weak (*debile*) nor faint (*formidinale*). In cases (1)–(3), contrary inclinations and, in turn, akratic actions are possible. In such cases, the will is often advised to use its inherent capacity of *non velle*, of postponing the judgement.<sup>105</sup>

When Buridan investigates the question of whether the will necessarily obeys the conclusion of the practical intellect, he introduces a distinction between uncertain and certain judgements:

If someone judges that something is good for him according to a consistent good reason, so that it appears good according to all good reasons and so that nothing evil follows, then, it seems to me, if this judgement is uncertain (*dubium*), the will nevertheless does not necessarily accept it . . . if the judgement in question is totally certain (*certum omnino*), i.e. that the person firmly and sufficiently believes he sees all relevant circumstances and all of the different possibilities, and, after having taken everything into consideration, he firmly believes that the decision in hand will be good for him in any case and by no means bad, then I say that the will necessarily accepts it.<sup>106</sup>

The self-determining capacity of the will thus consists in a far-reaching right of veto: as long as there is some doubt, the will is not required to act. Akratic actions pertain to these cases of uncertainty. Buridan's explanation of akrasia has some affinities with Donald Davidson's view, both maintaining that akratic action pertains to cases in which the intellectual judgement remains conditional or *prima facie*.<sup>107</sup> Only unconditional judgements prompt action necessarily.

Buridan's view applies different elements of the ancient and medieval interpretation history of akrasia. Buridan combines Aristotle's view of inevitable ignorance with the Stoic emphasis on judgement and assent. He takes over the voluntarist idea of the will's

<sup>105</sup> *Quaestiones*, lib. VII q6, 143ra (585). Saarinen (1994), 175–6.

<sup>106</sup> *Quaestiones*, lib. VII q8, 145 rb (594). Saarinen (1994), 181.

<sup>107</sup> See Saarinen (1993).

self-determination, but embeds it in a Thomist framework in which good action is rationally deliberated.<sup>108</sup> Buridan's own contribution can be seen in his consistent distinction between the first and second acts of the will, as well as in his underlining of the weak and uncertain nature of many, if not most, judgements. This contribution reveals some debt to Albert and Augustine, but it is, basically, a recognizable model which can be called a 'Buridanistic' analysis of human action.

In short, the Buridanistic model holds that while different and even contrary alternatives can appear under some aspect of goodness and thus create preliminary acts of complacency or displacency, the final assent of the will is given to one alternative. This alternative, chosen as a result of intellectual deliberation, represents the final judgement. In unclear and uncertain situations, the will can postpone the final judgement, since it need not accept uncertain judgements, but the will is also a rational faculty, not choosing directly against reason. Although clear-eyed akrasia is impossible, akratic actions occur in situations in which the judgement remains uncertain. Some ignorance or at least uncertainty needs to be presupposed in akratic behaviour. Although Buridan teaches the self-determination of the will, he does not appeal to it as the ground of incorrect choices.

We conclude this chapter with Table 1.1 of the models outlined in 1.1–1.5 (see next page). There is considerable overlap among different models, but the three major classes have their distinguishing features. The following chapters will employ this inventory in classifying the different explanations of akrasia. The models will be spelled out in more detail with regard to each author; this inventory only formulates some relevant catchwords.

<sup>108</sup> Cf. the insightful discussion of Zupko (2003), 249–51 and my differentiation of prudential deliberation in Saarinen (2003).

Table 1.1 Models of akrasia: a brief inventory

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**Platonic models. Distinctive feature: reason vs desire (but no syllogism, no assent)**

- Socratic-Platonic model: intellectualist action theory, no one goes wrong willingly
- commonplace Platonism: tripartite soul, strong lower part may overcome small higher part, therefore desire sometimes overcomes reason

**Aristotelian models. Distinctive feature: the practical syllogism**

- 1a: the minor premise is ignored in akrasia
- 1b: when the premises are not properly connected, akrasia can occur
- 2: in akrasia, the propositional conclusion is reached but not followed

**Stoic-Augustinian models. Distinctive feature: the concept of assent/consent/free will**

- strictly Stoic model: emotions are assented judgements, no real distinction between desire and consent
  - moderated Stoic model: emotions are preliminary judgements; later assents play a role
  - commonplace Augustinian model: a clear distinction between inevitable desires and free consent; the judgemental nature of desires remains in the background while merit and sin are consequential to the consent
  - Buridanism: rational decision-making within the commonplace Augustinian model
  - voluntarism: the self-determining will as the supreme ruler; the will represents the most noble part of the soul
  - Adam's akrasia: the will chooses freely without interference of emotions; passions and ignorance only emerge afterwards, as the consequence (punishment) of misguided choice
  - deliberate irrationality: the will chooses freely; the will does not represent the rational soul or the most noble part of the soul
-