

## ON CONSCIENCE AND PRUDENCE

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In this contribution on conscience, I shall be largely limiting my discourse to the etymological term itself '*conscientia*', or the 'application of knowledge to activity' (*Summa Theologiae*, I-II, 19, 5–6). That is, I will not be saying much about the correlative term *synderesis* although I will be making some reference to the connection between *synderesis* and *conscientia* at the end of my paper.

*Synderesis*, of course, is the divine spark or the basic notion of 'good' which is 'written' or 'implanted' in us. Peter Lombard, in his *Sentences* quotes Jerome's interpretation of the eagle in the vision in Ezekiel 1, 4–14 as that 'which the Greeks call synteresis (*synderesis*): that spark of conscience which was not even extinguished in the breast of Cain after he was turned out of paradise, and by which we discern that we sin, when we are overcome by pleasures or frenzy and meanwhile are misled by an imitation of reason'.<sup>1</sup> Hence, the role of *synderesis* is that of

an original memory of the good and true (both are identical) [which] has been implanted in us; [. . .] there is an inner ontological tendency within man, who is created in the likeness of God, toward the divine. . . . This anamnesis of the origin, which results from the godlike constitution of our being is not a conceptually articulated knowing, a store of retrievable contents. It is so to speak an inner sense, a capacity to recall, so that the one whom it addresses, if he is not turned in on himself, hears its echo from within. He sees: 'That's it! That is what my nature points to and seeks.'<sup>2</sup>

*Synderesis* may be largely obfuscated but this natural disposition of the human person towards the good is never completely extinguished. Its presence in the human person invariably points to the human desire to seek the good, to transcend the limits of sin and corruption, and to strive for union with God. *Synderesis* is to be associated with the ontological disposition essential to the apprehension of eternal truths which ultimately lead the human person closer to God.

Having considered, all too briefly, the level of *synderesis*, the function of *conscientia* is that of judging and deciding in the particular situation.<sup>3</sup> While *synderesis* has to do with *ratio superior* or the capacity to apprehend universal and eternal truths by which the human person, as a rational creature, shares to some degree in the '. . . guidance of created things on the part of God',<sup>4</sup> *conscientia* has to do with the *ratio inferior* involved in particular judgments in concrete situations. The link between the two 'levels' is interesting: one could insist that the connection could be brought out by a syllogism where *synderesis* embodies the axiom of natural law (the major premise), a factual situation is provided (the minor premise), and the conclusion (being the judgment itself) is identified with *conscientia*. However, such an understanding would be rather reductive in that the moral life would be reduced to nothing but an arid, mechanistic application of the moral code.

Now, it is interesting that Thomas Aquinas, in speaking of *synderesis* and *conscientia*, links the latter to prudence and the development of the virtues in general through his concern with

weakness of the will.<sup>5</sup> This tendency to link conscience with prudence, in Aquinas, is highly significant: according to Aquinas, *conscientia* is connected to the correct perception of individual circumstances which is, in turn, dependent on the person's moral character. This means that, primarily, the moral life has to do with the endeavour to perform the good knowingly and willingly rather than with actions governed by the fear of punishment. It also means that, although all human persons have the inner sense of *synderesis*, only those who have the virtue of prudence possess right conscience. Finally, it also points towards an ethical fellowship between God and humanity where conscience is considered to be the act whereby the human person, in consonance with the Creator, fulfils his or her own proper ethical end through his or her own exercise of reason.

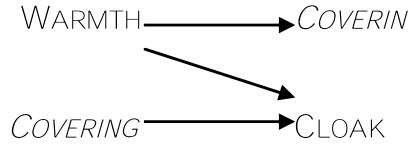
The key to the Thomist understanding of prudence is the Aristotelian notion of the so-called 'practical syllogism'. Now, this is a hugely complex issue of which I shall only be giving, here, a general overview. Aristotle notes that, like the theoretical syllogism, the practical syllogism consists in two kinds of premises. The first is a major premise that pertains to something wanted, or needed, or good, and is universal in that it shows that such and such a kind of man should do such and such a kind of act.<sup>6</sup> The second is a minor premise that relates to the particular or factual situational aspects of what, the person can see, falls under the major premise. In different places, he notes that premises (in practical matters) are of two kinds, universal and particular,<sup>7</sup> and that 'premises of action are of two kinds, of the good and of the possible'.<sup>8</sup> The parallel between the theoretical and practical syllogisms is drawn out further when he insists that:

The one opinion is universal, the other is concerned with the particular facts, and here we come to something within the sphere of perception; when a single opinion results from the two, the soul must in one type of case [theoretical reasoning] affirm the conclusion, while in the case of opinions concerned with production [practical reasoning] it must immediately act.<sup>9</sup>

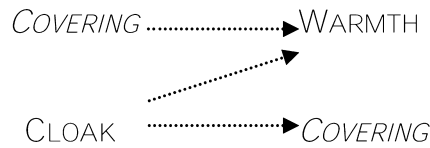
Hence, the two premises in the practical syllogism represent a logical structure that conceptualizes the *dynamic* structure of the soul. The conclusions or actions 'are the expression of deliberative desire which is the result of the coalescing of desire . . . with the reasoning set out in the premises'.<sup>10</sup> The major premise expresses an inclination or want while the minor premise expresses some (constituent or productive) means related to the good wanted.

Now, once again, this approach could well appear to be one where 'practical principles form a closed, consistent deductive system, beginning with a priori first principles concerning the essence or nature of man', where the system is notable for its lack of freedom since, from the *a priori* first principles, there follows 'a closed, consistent hierarchy of rules of practice, covering both the moral and non-moral sides of human life, down to the smallest details: the decision to eat some candy, the need to make a cloak'. In deciding what to do, one need only 'subsume the situation under the relevant rule, plug it into the right place in the hierarchy'.<sup>11</sup>

However, such an approach is largely not tenable. One must consider that an important formal feature of the practical syllogism is that it proceeds in a very different direction from theoretical reasoning.<sup>12</sup> Indeed, a standard deductive – that is, theoretical – syllogism proceeds in a 'downward direction', namely, from its major term through the middle term, to the minor term where the 'holding conduit' between the major and the minor terms is necessary. The point, clearly, is to nail down the inescapable truth in the particular instance: if *warmth* holds of every *covering* and *covering* holds of every *cloak*, then *warmth* holds of every *cloak* and no cloak would be exempt from this necessary truth. Hence, the direction is as follows:



In a practical syllogism, the direction is *different*. For here, the movement conducive to getting at the good – that is, the major term – proceeds from the minor term, though the middle, and to the major, term. Here, the reasoning runs more like: *covering* leads to *warmth*, *cloak* leads to *covering*, the *cloak* leads to *warmth*. The direction is teleological:



This comparison makes it clear that the point of theoretical and of practical syllogisms is different. In the first case, the point of the rules is to ensure that that one never passes from true assertions to false assertions; theoretical syllogisms are ‘truth-preserving’. The concern of practical syllogisms appears to be different; they aim at ensuring that one gets to where one wants to. Practical reasoning establishes a link between a goal and an action in such a manner that one achieves one’s goal; it seeks to ensure that the goodness sought is preserved in the conclusion that is the decision to adopt the means.<sup>13</sup> For, commonly, one finds oneself in a position where one must choose, among possible courses of action, one which would be most suitable in order to serve one’s purpose and achieve it. The function of the rules of practical reasoning is to ensure that one does not pass from a plan of action that is adequate to achieve one’s goals to one which is inadequate. And it is important to see that just as the agent cannot have *any intention whatsoever* – his intention must fall within a possible human practice in order to be intelligible – it does not depend on the agent as to which of the courses of action are compatible with, or effective of, the achievement of his purpose. Independently of the agent, certain plans are more satisfactory to certain purposes than others; also independently of the agent, certain plans would just be incompatible with his or her purposes.<sup>14</sup>

Such considerations led Anthony Kenny to suggest that the logic operative in practical reasoning is the ‘logic of satisfactoriness’.<sup>15</sup> Hence, the rules of practical reasoning would be satisfactoriness-preserving, ensuring that one does not pass, from a plan of action which is satisfactory, to one which is unsatisfactory for that purpose. This means, of course, that a plan is satisfactory *relative to a given set of wants*. And in this it is different from the truth-preserving logic of theoretical syllogisms: while truth and falsehood are absolute notions, a plan of action can be satisfactory for some purposes but not for others.

This logic of satisfactoriness, which is held by Richard M. Hare to be re-describable as a logic of sufficient conditions,<sup>16</sup> turns out to be exactly isomorphic to the logic of inference to the best explanation, or inductive logic, in the theoretical sphere. This parallel is exciting because it clearly brings out the fact that, just as something is not an explanation *simpliciter* and *absolute* but is an explanation of a given set of data, some action is not satisfactory *simpliciter* and *absolute* but is satisfactory given a set of wants.<sup>17</sup> And, just as a theory that had been adequate

to explain a given set of data may cease to be adequate when new data are added, in practical reasoning, if one were to add new wants or new contexts or new extraneous factors in general (say, in the ‘cloak’ example, if one were to see that all the available cloth from which cloaks could be made was badly moulded), one could not be sure that the conclusion would remain satisfactory (in the changed circumstances, one could, for instance, choose to use a blanket as a covering, provided it is available and suitable). This characteristic of practical reasoning is referred to as its defeasibility.<sup>18</sup>

This defeasibility, or looseness, in practical reasoning is manifest in a number of manners, all of which, once again, show the distinction between reasons and mechanistic causes. For instance, the fact that a pattern of reasoning, which would justify a certain course of action, would cease to justify it if further wants are brought in as premises of the practical reasoning, would be dealt with, by one who claimed that, say, beliefs and desires are quasi-mechanistic causes of actions, as an exemplar of causal interference. That is, he would hold that the new premises are expressions of causal factors that interfere mechanically with the causality of the wants expressed by the original premises. However, when there are conflicts between wants in the sense that an action that would lead to the satisfaction of one would lead to the frustration of the other, what happens is not a result in the sense of a vector product of all the tendencies so that, if nothing happens at all, the ‘nothing’ may be the sum of equal and opposite actual effects.<sup>19</sup> What happens is, rather, a choice of one of the possible actions, normally *for a reason*, or, if at all possible, an attempt at a harmonious satisfaction of a number of wants so that a different conclusion might be reached in which the wider set of wants is satisfied.

The looseness in the practical syllogism is also manifest in the fact that, unlike in the case of deductive theoretical reasoning where the same premises cannot lead to incompatible conclusions, in practical reasoning, the same reasons can accommodate different and jointly incompatible conclusions. Hence, the beliefs and desires of the agent in the ‘cloak’ example could be reasons for a wide range of actions – such as making a cloak, making a blanket, borrowing some clothes, stealing them, making a fire and so forth – some of which are jointly incompatible.

Here a Leibnizian objection could be that, if practical reasoning can lead to jointly incompatible conclusions, then the agent could have no sufficient reason to choose one, rather than another, conclusion. However, such an objection betrays the tendency of thinking of reasons as mechanistic causes and, just as in the case of vector analysis, would have the burden of explaining why human agents are not more often, and irredeemably, in the equivalent of the excruciating dilemma of Buridan’s ass. Indeed, human dilemmas are provoked by not knowing what to do rather than being tugged at by equal and opposite forces. Human beings normally act for reasons. The claim that one has a reason for what one is doing is not weakened, as an explanation, by the fact that there are other, equally good, if not better, ways of achieving the same purpose or that one could act on other, more worthy, purposes. Reasons do not necessitate as mechanical causes do.

This looseness in practical reasoning means that one can take exception to an instance of practical reasoning at a number of levels, where, if any of the objections work, the practical syllogism would fail to ensue into action, though not on account of any fault in the practical calculation. One may, for example, come to hold the desirability characteristic unworthy or even false as might happen when a person deceives himself into thinking that he is finally pursuing something good, which good is only illusory. Indeed, practical reasoning is concerned with issues of truth. For, if intentional actions are actions under a description, then the concepts of truth and falsity apply to actions strictly and properly. On one level, the agent normally makes true the descriptions of what he or she does, under which he or she does them. On the ethical level, practical truth is produced when the judgement is true and the wanting right; that is, ‘truth

in agreement with right desire'<sup>20</sup> brought about when one forms and executes a good choice. Hence the person who makes bad choices may be committing errors of thought. He or she will have produced practical falsehood, for the description, say, that he or she has performed justice would be false.<sup>21</sup>

Of course, what might also happen is that other wants are introduced into the context within which the practical reasoning is performed. Moreover, it might be the case that one may come to see that the action proposed falls under another description than the one being considered, which description highlights the undesirability of the action. Here it is interesting, and important, to note the multiplicity of aspects of the good as possible answers to the question 'What is the good of that?' or, as Anscombe had put it, 'Why?'. The point is that, while bivalency is a feature of truth-functional logic, an action that is seen to have the value of 'good', for given reasons, may also come to be seen to have the value 'bad', for other reasons.

In all this, it is clear that practical reasoning is predominantly not a deductive type of reasoning. Perhaps Aristotle's comparison of calculation in practical reasoning with the ancient Greek method of geometrical *analysis* (ανάλυσις)<sup>22</sup> could prove illuminating.<sup>23</sup> This parallel is manifest in that, in practical reasoning, the agent posits the action in the context within which he or she is embedded, *in the light of* the end or want desired. Hence, in analysis, as it were, one works outside the deductive flow; one starts from the desired end and moves from one view of the broader context, to another in turn and so forth, in the direction of the agent and his or her possibilities, where each 'step' is related to and not inconsistent with the previous one. Just as what is analysed in geometric analysis is not the deductive step from axioms and earlier theorems to the desired result, but is the geometrical configuration of the figure – that is the result – in terms of the myriad interdependencies of the different geometrical entities that make it up, in practical reason, what are analysed are the myriad interrelations of the practical elements in the contextual circumstances in terms of the logically prior end, or purpose, of the agent.

It is significant that Aristotle speaks here of a hypothetical starting-point of deliberation in terms of its aim (τέλος) and describes how one tries to reason 'backwards', in the light of the aim, to ways and means to bring this about. It is also significant that he appears to draw a parallel between the auxiliary constructions which one posits in order to solve, analytically, a geometrical problem, and where there is no possible *a priori* guarantee of success, and the means (органа) by which the desired result is to be brought about.<sup>24</sup> Also significant is the weight Aristotle gives to the claim that the proper state of the practical intellect (φρονησις) is akin to a perceptual capacity (αισθησις):

[P]ractical reason (φρονησις) is concerned with the ultimate particular (του εσχάτου), which is the object not of scientific knowledge (επιστημη) but of perception (αισθησις) – not the perception of qualities peculiar to one sense but a perception akin to that by which we perceive that the particular figure before us is a triangle; for in that direction as well as in that of the major premiss there will be a limit. But this is rather perception than practical wisdom, though it is another kind of perception than that of the qualities peculiar to each sense.<sup>25</sup>

[W]hen we speak of judgement and understanding and practical wisdom and intuitive reason we credit the same people with possessing judgement and having reached years of reason and with having practical wisdom and understanding. For all these faculties deal with ultimates, i.e. with particulars; and being a man of understanding and of good or sympathetic judgement consists in being able to judge about the things with which practical wisdom is concerned . . . Now all things which have to be done are included among particulars or ultimates; for not only must the man of practical wisdom know particular facts, but understanding and judgement are also concerned with things to be done, and these are ultimates . . . the intuitive reason involved in practical reasonings grasps the last and variable fact, i.e. the

minor premise. For these variable facts are the starting-points for the apprehension of the end, since the universals are reached from the particulars; of these therefore we must have perception, and this perception is intuitive reason (νοῦς).<sup>26</sup>

Indeed, as Hintikka and Remes point out, the distinctive feature is not so much the direction of reasoning: in the geometrical sense, it is not so much one's passage from one proposition to another that is in play; in a way, it can be said that *analysis has no direction*.<sup>27</sup> Rather, what is central to analysis is the fact that analytic reasoning uses the starting-point, that is the desired result, in the reasoning itself by analysing the dynamic interrelations and interdependencies of the elements involved in the geometrical figure with reference to which the proof of the desired theorem is to be carried out. Thus far, the parallel in practical reasoning is that one views the way things are in one's corner of the world in the light of one's wants. That is, one *sees* in this complex (i.e. non-linear) network of connections what is of practical significance and what is of no such significance in one's situation. One looks on one's situation *as a practical one* where one sees what the network of dynamic interrelations and interdependencies of the practical elements around one is, and how it could (practically) work.

Of course, there are a number of situations where the premises setting out the goods are complete, that is, there could be no further wants that could slight the satisfactoriness of the action. This could happen in, for example, the case of absolute negative prohibitions that one upholds in such a way that they silence all other possible considerations such as 'One ought never to directly kill an innocent person'. Other examples of such delimitation of wants could occur within the ambit of particular skills or arts (what Aristotle called τεχνῶν) like the art of medicine, where one could have general positive rules that approach completeness to a sufficient degree to prevent most – though not all – cases of defeasibility, while they are specific enough to entail practical conclusions. Hence, within the restricted context, they would stipulate that one should *always* do such-and-such, or insist that doing such-and-such is always good or suitable or useful (even here, such a rule could be hedged by considerations like 'unless it would be foolish in the circumstances'). In such circumstances, one is reasoning to necessary conditions in practical contexts, which kind of reasoning is isomorphic to deductive theoretical reasoning. In a technical arena like medicine, for instance, a doctor might well agonize about the specific treatment to administer to a particular patient in a difficult case but, in most cases, she will not need to do so. Indeed, certain procedures in crafts and technical practices, and certain virtues in a person's life, demand that certain facts count for nothing in the situation. Such could happen, for example, in a situation where the courageous agent sees that the likelihood of suffering grievous injury is silenced in the face of the defence of the innocent against an aggressor.<sup>28</sup>

However, there obviously are situations where the practically relevant facts are only dimly recognized by the agent and, as it were, she needs to peer more closely in order to see what to do. Indeed, in a good number of cases of moral reasoning, what determines the concern on which a person acts in the one case is that some of the potentially relevant aspects of the situation – rather than others – strike the person as what is pertinent in the situation. Apart from the scope of the aforementioned negative prohibitions, and cases within the restricted context of specific arts or sciences, the agent cannot rest assured that, by carrying out a piece of practical reasoning to its necessary conditions and acting accordingly, there is not *more* he or she must do in order to achieve his or her goals.

What is interesting here is that the particular selection of specific features of the situation from among others as significant manifests the specific shape of the practical intellect or φρονησις. Once again, this is often not a deductive process; it is not a question of possessing

a particular framework or theory that allows particular conclusions to be deduced from its premises in conjunction with particular facts afforded by a cine-camera-like capacity. Rather, the proper state of the practical intellect or φρονησις is a *perceptual capacity* which means that the deliverances of one's perception are intertwined with the moulding or shaping of one's perceptual intellect. It forms a background to the way one speaks, thinks, acts, and what one calls good reasons.

Aquinas clearly concurs with this interpretation. He notes that:

Other intellectual virtues, but not prudence, can exist without moral virtue. The reason for this is that prudence is right judgment about things to be done, and this not merely in general, but also in the particular instance, wherein action takes place. Prerequisite for right judgment are principles from which reason proceeds. Yet when reason is concerned with the particular, it needs not only universal principles, but also particular ones. So far as the general principles of practice are concerned, a man is rightly disposed by a natural understanding, by which he knows that he should do no evil, and by some normative science. Yet this is not enough in order that a man may reason rightly about particular cases. In fact, it happens sometimes that general principles and conclusions of understanding and science are swept away in the particular case by a passion. Thus to one who is overcome by lust, the object of his desire then seems good, although it is against his general convictions. Consequently, as by the habits of natural understanding and science, a man is rightly disposed in regard to general truths, so, in order that he be rightly disposed with regard to the particular principles of action, namely, their ends, he needs to be perfected by certain habits, whereby it becomes, as it were, connatural to him to judge rightly about an end. This is done by moral virtue, for the virtuous man judges rightly of the end of virtue, because, as Aristotle says, "such as a man is, such does the end seem to him" (*Ethic.* III, 5. 1114a32). Consequently, right judgment about things to be done, namely prudence, requires that a man has moral virtue.<sup>29</sup>

Aquinas here links prudence with a correct perception of particular circumstances. Although *synderesis* continues to provide the agent's ontological orientation towards the good, its 'precepts' remain rather empty and general. Such principles as 'Do good and avoid evil' and 'obey God' need to be fleshed out in more specific ways and also need to be accompanied with an apprehension of particular circumstances.

This element of situational appreciation, which results in a specific evaluation of the circumstances, a definite kind of care or concern, and one's embarkation on specific projects, means that the agent lives within a certain kind of world where her eyes are opened to certain kinds of reasons by her acquiring a second nature. In practical reasoning, in the light of the 'premise of the good' or the content of the conception of doing well, the description of one feature, rather than another of the situation, serves as the 'premise of the possible'.<sup>30</sup> In the case of theoretical reasoning, the 'major premise', which is the content of the conception expressed in one's world-picture, constitutes part of the very background that forms the 'ground' on which one stands when one judges and in the light of which the descriptions of some features rather than others, are seen to be pertinent as 'minor premises' in one's investigation. One sees that such-and-such is what matters in this situation; one notes that one can offer reasons to justify one's appreciation only up to a certain point after which one simply says 'You have to see it!' to those who have a rather different situational appreciation from one's own.

The same is true for *epikeia* which was considered by both Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas to be a moral virtue; the ethical framework within which the concept of *epikeia* developed is one where the virtues constitute goals that are stably desired by the virtuous person and that thereby enable φρονησις to identify, practically connaturally, the particular action to be taken to achieve those goals. Hence, *epikeia* belongs to this context of prudent realization of the desired

goal through virtuous habit. This view means that *epikeia* is the principle of decisions that are excellent: in ‘correcting’ the law that ‘sins’ by reason of its universality, *epikeia* is the perfection and completion of justice. This, in turn, means that it would be misleading to simply transfer the concept of *epikeia* to a normative context where the good is based on law. To say that the moral norms concerning justice allow for exceptions would be to create confusion; strictly speaking, *epikeia* is not a question of kindness, nor does it have to do with tolerance or dispensation. It is rather a situational appreciation by the just person which means that, *in the light of justice*, the description of one situational feature rather than another is seen to be pertinent as the ‘premise of the possible’.<sup>31</sup>

This situational appreciation means that our basic relation to the world is not an interpretative one; rather, it is one of continuous aspect-perception. Our everyday moral experience of the world is not to be understood as a logical or theoretical construction out of brute data. For, such an understanding would presuppose that aspect-blindness were the normal human state.

Rather, it is somewhat akin to the manner in which we choose and value words:

How do I find the ‘right’ word? How do I choose among words? Without doubt it is sometimes as if I were comparing them by fine differences of smell: *That* is too . . . , *that* is too . . . , – *this* is the right one. – But I do not always have to make judgments, give explanations; often I might only say: ‘It simply isn’t right yet’. I am dissatisfied, I go on looking. At last a word comes: ‘*That’s* it!’ *Sometimes* I can say why. This is simply what searching, this is what finding, is like here. (PI 218)

Indeed, in many cases of moral reasoning, the lack of hesitation manifested in one’s practices shows that one has taken certain reasons for actions to heart and assimilated them as part of one’s second nature when one learns to do and to enjoy them for their own sake; that is, one understands and appreciates their intrinsic value. One comes to appreciate and act in such-and-such a way precisely because it is just or noble to do so. If one did not yet assimilate such reasoning as part of one’s second nature, one would be in the position of attempting to *interpret* the situation as if one pursued virtues for their own sake; in *deed*, one would be acting in such-and-such a manner, say, in order to escape some form of sanction. That is, such a person could only offer external, contingent reasons – such as the threat of punishment by an external social order – for acting in such-and-such a way. In other words, she does not move and act readily and easily. She still feels that the ‘technique’ she must learn stands between her and the world.

Perhaps we can conclude by reflecting on the position of the akratic or weak-willed person of whom a rather trivial example could be provided by the diabetic who is swayed to indulge in a very sweet cake. Here, one could contemplate two different kinds of flaws. One flaw would regard the content of the *akratês*’ knowledge of the more specific dictates of practical reasoning and their application in particular circumstances, the other is a flaw where the *akratês*’ grasp itself is defective; it is not yet fully integrated into his or her habituated tendencies with respect to his or her emotions. Hence, one could contemplate a situation where the content of the *akratês*’ practical thinking is correct – in an attenuated sense – with regards to both his general conception and the choices he ‘sort of’ makes, in knowing that his craving for sweet things has no practical significance in the present circumstances, and where the *akratês* nevertheless acts on his craving. Aristotle for one is committed throughout to conceiving ‘the development of the state of the practical intellect as inseparable from the development of the proper state of ethical character’.<sup>32</sup> The problem of the *akratês* is that the practical thinking with the sort of content he or she is akratic about is not yet fully ingrained into his or her character. The unfortunate result is that, when one is akratic, one lets oneself be swayed by considerations which one’s own practical thinking shows to be practically irrelevant in the circumstances.



Our reflections show that at best we are all journeying towards moral integrity and that our moral character may be somewhat marred at a number of levels. The case of the *akratês* shows a deficiency at a more particular and specific level. But it can very well be the case that there exists, in the life of an agent, a longer-standing deficiency at a more fundamental level which makes him or her deaf to certain promptings of goodness and truth and which means that the agent comes to have askew moral convictions. Of course, the agent must not act contrary to her conscience but her guilt would lie then in a much deeper place — not in the present judgment of conscience but in the neglect of her fundamental calling towards goodness and truth.

The process of moral maturation is to learn to do what is virtuous, that is, to make it a habit or second nature to come to enjoy doing virtuous actions for their own sake: the virtuous person has the right dispositions and therefore takes the appropriate pleasure in doing that which is virtuous. Hence, in the person of virtue and practical wisdom, all responses and evaluations 'are integrated . . . [and] infused and corrected by the reasoned scheme of values',<sup>33</sup> in such a way that 'the virtuous person's conception of what is truly pleasant is now shaped by his independent, reasoned conception of what is good . . . [so that] nothing will tempt or lure him as much as the temperate . . . action itself.'<sup>34</sup> Nothing else will seem as pleasurable'.<sup>35</sup>

Obviously very few of us are like that!

There is, however, a real place for hope in human life. While conscience often indicts justly and sometimes guiltily fails to indict, the human longing for a truth that pardons and expiates has been answered in a way that transcends both our capabilities and our incapacities, both our hopes and our yearnings. This of course is the centre of the Christian message.

## Notes

1 Translated in Timothy C. Potts, *Conscience in Mediaeval Philosophy*, Cambridge 1980, 79–80.

2 Joseph Ratzinger, *Conscience and Truth*, in *On Conscience*, National Catholic Bioethics Centre, Ignatius Press 2007, 32.

3 Thomas Aquinas formally divides *conscientia* into three elements: recognizing (*recognoscere*), bearing witness (*testificari*), and judging (*judicare*).

4 Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I-II, 91, 1 and 2.

5 See Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I-II, 19, 5–6.

6 See Aristotle, *De Anima*, III, 434a 16. The point is that generalizations of such a degree of abstraction characterize reasoning and constitute the difference between animal desires (which can be verbalized in singular sentences such as 'I want to drink'; 'This is drink' [see Aristotle, *De motu animalium*, VII, 701a 31–33]) and characteristically human practical reasoning.

7 See Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, VII, 1147a 1–4 and 1147 a 25–26.

8 Aristotle, *De motu animalium*, VII, 701a 23–25.

9 Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, VII, 1147a 27–31. See also Aristotle, *De motu animalium*, VII, 701a 10–17.

10 Anthony Kenny, *Aristotle's Theory of the Will* (London: Duckworth, 1979), 158.

11 Martha Nussbaum, *Aristotle's 'De motu animalium'* (Princeton/NJ: Princeton University Press, 1978), 167. One must note that Martha Nussbaum radically opposes this 'deductivist' account.

12 In setting out the discussion on the difference in direction, I am indebted to Kevin Flannery (see Kevin Flannery, *Acts Amid Precepts* [Washington D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2001], 9 and 196).

13 See Anthony Kenny, *Aristotle's Theory of the Will* (London: Duckworth, 1979), 128, 144–146; See also Anthony Kenny, *The Metaphysics of Mind* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), 43–44.

14 This shows that practical and theoretical reasoning are intertwined. Theoretical knowledge is present in practical knowledge in that the ability to read situations draws on one's previous understanding, and one's seeing and judging takes place in the realm of intelligible reality.

15 See Anthony Kenny, 'Practical Inference,' *Analysis* (1966): 71–75; see also Anthony Kenny, *Will, Freedom and Power* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1975), 79–96.

16 See Richard M. Hare, *Practical Inferences* (London: Macmillan, 1971), 68–69.

17 Indeed, as Jaakko Hintikka pointed out in his article ‘Practical vs. Theoretical Reason – An Ambiguous Legacy,’ (in *Practical Reason*, ed. Stephan Körner [New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974], 83–102), it is extremely instructive to find exactly the same conceptual model at the basis of both the most typical operation of practical reason and the main methodological paradigm of early modern science: that of geometrical analysis. Isaac Newton’s conception of the experimental method, for instance, was that it ‘represented a kind of analytical situation . . . in that what is happening in a typical controlled [crucial] experiment is a study of what depends on what in it – and hopefully also precisely what mathematical relationships these dependencies exemplify’ (Jaakko Hintikka and Unto Remes, *The Method of Analysis: Its Geometrical Origin and Its General Significance* [Dordrecht: D. Reidel Publishing Company, 1974], 106). It is crucial to point out here, however, that – contrary to most philosophers of science who would tend to appeal to the correlation of the increasing probability of the validity of the hypothesis with the increase in the number of experimental trials – within this method in early modern science, what was central was ‘the cogency of a *single* well-contrived experiment to answer a specific question, as opposed to the Baconian procedure of collecting and comparing innumerable ‘instances’ of a phenomenon . . . [hence,] the role of the crucial experiment apparently must have been [for Newton], not the elimination of competing hypotheses, but the very formation of the law to be “rendered general by induction” ’ (Ibid., 110–111).

18 See Anthony Kenny, *Will, Freedom and Power* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1975), 92–93. See also Peter Geach, *Logic Matters* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1981), 285–286. The defeasibility of practical reasoning is indicated by the dotted arrows in the discussion on the direction of reasoning above.

19 Peter Geach (1916–) rightly throws scorn on such an interpretation of human action. See Gertrude Elizabeth Margaret Anscombe and Peter Geach, *Three Philosophers* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1961), 103.

20 Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, vi, 1139a 30.

21 See Gertrude Elizabeth Margaret Anscombe, ‘Thought and Action in Aristotle,’ in *From Parmenides to Wittgenstein: Collected Philosophical Papers, I* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1981), 76–77.

22 See Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, iii, 1112b 15–29.

23 See Jaakko Hintikka and Unto Remes, *The Method of Analysis: Its Geometrical Origin and Its General Significance* (Dordrecht: D. Reidel Publishing Company, 1974), 85–87.

24 See Jaakko Hintikka and Unto Remes, *The Method of Analysis: Its Geometrical Origin and Its General Significance* (Dordrecht: D. Reidel Publishing Company, 1974), 87.

25 Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, vi, 1142a 26–30.

26 Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, vi, 1143a 25–1143b 5.

27 See Jaakko Hintikka and Unto Remes, *The Method of Analysis: Its Geometrical Origin and Its General Significance* (Dordrecht: D. Reidel Publishing Company, 1974), 38.

28 See David Wiggins, ‘Deliberation and Practical Reasoning,’ in *Essays on Aristotle’s Ethics*, ed. Amélie Oksenberg Rorty (Berkeley/CA: University of California Press, 1980), 234.

29 Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I-II, 58, 5.

30 I am here using the terminology of Aristotle, *De motu animalium*, vii, 701a 9ff.

31 See Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* V, 10; Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, II-II, q. 120, a. 1. The example Aquinas gives is the law that all deposits should be returned. Of course, this is a good law. Yet, if a madman gives his sword as a deposit and asks for it to be returned for use in a murderous spree, to accede to his request would be contrary to the common good. The virtue of *epikeia* would enable one to make the prudential judgement that, *for the sake of justice*, the weapon must not be returned *hic et nunc*. Another, more recent, example concerns a person hiding Jews from the Nazis who is confronted by the Gestapo. In such a scenario, admitting that one is hosting Jews would be an act *contrary to justice*.

32 John McDowell, ‘Comment on Irwin’s “Some Rational Aspects of Incontinence”’, *Southern Journal of Philosophy* 27 Supplement (1988): 97. McDowell refers, here, to M. F. Burnyeat, ‘Aristotle on Learning to be Good,’ in *Essays on Aristotle’s Ethics*, ed. Amélie Oksenberg Rorty (Berkeley/CA: University of California Press, 1980), 69–92.

33 M. F. Burnyeat, ‘Aristotle on Learning to be Good,’ in *Essays on Aristotle’s Ethics*, ed. Amélie Oksenberg Rorty (Berkeley/CA: University of California Press, 1980), 80.

34 Aristotle holds that in the temperate man, the appetitive element harmonizes with reason so that the temperate man desires the things he ought, as he ought, and when he ought, and this is what reason directs (see Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, iii, 1119b 13–18).

35 M. F. Burnyeat, ‘Aristotle on Learning to be Good,’ in *Essays on Aristotle’s Ethics*, ed. Amélie Oksenberg Rorty (Berkeley/CA: University of California Press, 1980), 88.