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INTRODUCTION

Video meliora, proboque,
deteriora sequor.

(I see the better and approve it,
But I follow the worse.)

Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, VII, 20

Ovid puts these now infamous words into the mouth of Medea, and they, like no other, seem to characterize her tortured soul. We all know the story as Euripides tells it: her husband, Jason, deserts her in order to, he claims, secure the future of their two sons. She, on the other hand, is banished from Corinth by its king Creon, but she does not succumb. Instead, she retaliates by killing the king and his daughter, which Jason is set to marry, and finally she also kills her two sons in a furious attempt of revenge on their father. Ever since this was written commentators have disagreed on how to understand Medea's behavior. Why, in particular, does she claim that she knows better and acts for the worse? Are we really to believe that *she*, of all people, has a weak will?

It seems clear that Medea is torn between conflicting emotions. This is, at least, the interpretation the Stoic Seneca gives in his own version of the tragedy. Torn between love for her sons and hatred towards her treacherous husband, she acts as uncontrolled as waves in a stormy sea. Seneca does not let Medea say that she knows better. He portrays her as utterly unable to find a rational stance towards what is happening and to grasp her role in the situation correctly. She does realize, it seems, that she ought to be controlled by reason, but she cannot see what reason would dictate. Seneca's Medea does not have a weak will. She is a captive of her emotions; feeling the insufficiency of her reason.

Sixteen centuries later Thomas Hobbes reacts to the quoted line by proclaiming: "that saying, as pretty as it is, is not true". He does not see how Medea's actions can result from anything else but "the last dictate of her judgment" preceding them. As he construes the situation, her emotional action simply means that she follows her "present thought [...] of the *good* or *evil* consequence". With rational deliberation, the good or evil sequels come to be evaluated more carefully, but this is not what Medea does. Although she has time for deliberation, she is unable to do it.

Medea's example has not been at the center of contemporary discussions in philosophy of mind and action, at least not as it used to be up to the time of Hobbes. One possible reason is that philosophical problems related to emotions and to emotional motivations for actions have risen to the awareness of analytically oriented philosophers only quite recently. Howsoever one interprets Euripides' or Seneca's tragedies, Medea's example is *not* an example of rational choice, which used to be the paradigm case for the analyses of the reasons and motivations for human action. Medea's example is an example of someone acting under the pressures of a multitude of rational and emotional motivations.

In this book, we are not developing a theory of action in the sense of contemporary analytic philosophy. Instead, the purpose is to give a detailed account of how philosophers, roughly, between Seneca and Hobbes have dealt with certain problems of the philosophy of mind associated with human action. The articles attend different topics, different periods of time, and a multitude of theories created by different authors, but as a whole they cover the topic in a historically continuous way. The intention is to shed light on the development of the philosophical psychology of human action in the Middle Ages.

While there has been a considerable amount of work done on this topic in the area of ancient philosophy, medieval theories of emotions have hardly been studied at all and medieval discussions of freedom and will have so far been looked at mainly from a theological viewpoint. We see no reason to neglect the wealth of philosophically elaborate material existing from the Middle Ages. On the contrary, it seems even more important, since it is the period when ancient conceptions gradually lost their grip and gave way to what we now know as the modern way of understanding human emotions and rationality. We are particularly interested in seeing how the modern conceptions arose.

The papers aim at full historical accuracy on the topics they discuss. At times, this means recognizing the present gaps in knowledge and the inability to clear mists over yet unexplored territories. Medieval philosophy is still not very well-known, which applies particularly to the topic of this book. Most of the textual material is still hidden in unpublished manuscripts that have not been studied or — as the case often is — even properly catalogued. This situation must not, we believe, hinder us from using what has been brought to our attention by modern scholarship. As we see it, drawing from these resources can help us understand better the philosophical problems we encounter nowadays.

While the articles avoid making speculative historical claims, the aim of the rest of the introduction is to find a general overall description of the philosophical development of this topic, and we ask the reader to keep this in mind while reading. Drawing a history of philosophy with only a few brush-strokes always becomes speculative, and the case is even more so in this area.

ANCIENT MODELS

The first person mentioned in our title is Anicius Manlius Severinus Boethius (c. 480–525). He was a wealthy Roman born at a time when his nation was in decay. He made a distinguished political career under the gothic king Theoderic, but this is not why he is known today. His fame is instead based on his achievements in transmitting the disappearing philosophical knowledge of the ancient time to future generations. He produced textbook presentations on several topics, and, according to himself, his translations and commentaries of Aristotle's logical works are only the beginning of a more ambitious project of translating all of Plato and Aristotle into Latin — knowledge of Greek was becoming rare among his contemporaries. Boethius' friend and colleague Cassiodorus (c. 490–585) has left his footprints in history as well. He founded the monastery of Vivarium, which was to play a major role in establishing the tradition of producing new manuscript copies of ancient books during the 'dark centuries' to follow.

Contemplating the lives of these two makes one suspect that Boethius, to some extent, was aware of his status as "last of the ancients, first of the medievals". Though he, of course, could not know what was to come, he seems to have been aware of the fact that the ancient civilization was in danger of disappearing. He, thus, fits very well as the first milestone of our

presentation. The task of the first three articles of this volume is, namely, to provide a picture of how the ancient traditions were gradually, but innovatively, absorbed by early medieval intellectuals.

We are, of course, not so interested in Boethius' achievements on the general cultural scene. Our main interest is in the way he transmitted ancient outlooks on human moral psychology to later generations. As Calvin G. Normore shows in his contribution, Boethius' *The Consolation of Philosophy* presents the philosophically cultivated viewpoint towards morality as based on two theses. According to Boethius, human action always aims at what is perceived to be good, that is, everything we do is ultimately motivated by some kind of apprehension of the goodness of things. Furthermore, he also seems to think that deliberation is not about the ultimate good, but about the means of achieving it.

It seems that modern scholars have more or less confirmed Boethius' sympathetic understanding of the overall tendencies of classical moral psychology. For example, in the conclusion of her book *The Morality of Happiness*, Julia Annas presents the philosophical starting point of ancient ethics as the idea of an overarching value giving direction to the whole life of the morally reflective person. Annas does not hesitate to claim that on the ancient picture — excepting only the Cyrenaics — “all the various aims and values do hang together”, and it is the main task of moral philosophy to make one more able to organize one's aims and priorities in respect of this ‘final end’. Furthermore, she draws the main lines of ancient ethics in such a way that a single concept of ‘happiness’ captures relatively well the general content of what the final end for humans is. As the ancients saw it, all human beings do and ought to aim at happiness, but the problematic issue is recognizing what this happiness really is. (See Annas 1993, p. 440.)

Since we are here interested in ancient philosophical psychology only as the background for the medieval discussions, we can accept the concept of happiness as it is used by Annas. As she herself recognizes, one of the main problems in the use of this concept to describe *the good*, is that happiness seems to be a self-centered concept. When I seek happiness, it seems to be *my* happiness that I am after. In a way, we appear to jump from *the good* to *the good for me*. This seems to exclude genuine friendship, where I am acting for the best of my friend even against my own interests; furthermore, this kind of ethical stance seems to leave no room for justice as a virtue. When I am just, I have concerns for others even when I have no special relation to

them. If the good for me clashes with the good for society, I am supposed to give way. How can this be, if my sole moral motivation is happiness?

This is an important question that lies behind many of the medieval developments discussed in this book. In this way the medieval discussions of the contrast between self-interest and moral motivation are characteristically modern. The modern conception of morality is typically articulated as utterly opposed to (or at least distinct from) self-interest. We would like to stress the fact that this way of looking at the problems of morality did not arise out of nothing in early modern philosophy. Instead, it was a natural result of the medieval developments, where the traditional equation of happiness and goodness was considerably problematized, and where philosophers started to consider whether and how one can be motivated to act against or independently of one's own interests.

In twentieth-century continental philosophy the concept *other* has had a crucial importance in designating the way in which we as subjects realize the presence or the possibility of other subjects. One may well ask if such a concept played any role in ancient ethics. For example, the conceptual content of justice and friendship need not be understood in terms of a distinction between me and the *other* for whom I have concern, not even on the eudaimonist picture. A relatively feasible way to conceive of such a concept is to extend the range of the happiness I am seeking outside my own person, and think of the relevant moral subject as a larger whole. In such a way, justice can be seen as the balancing of the parts of a whole.

Notoriously, Aristotle's idea is that individual humans are mere parts in larger wholes. He writes (*Nicomachean Ethics* I, 7; 1097 b8–11):

We apply the term perfect and self-sufficient good, not to a solitary life of living on one's own, but to a life lived with parents, children, wife, friends and citizens.

In this well-known sense, Aristotle's eudaimonism is not egoistic. Nevertheless, it seems not to require a genuine concern for *others*, who are not in any way attached to me. Indeed, Aristotle notes that we do not have concern for "the furthest Mysian" — which is his term for a completely unknown stranger from the furthest place on earth.

If we look at the Stoics, we seem to find a somewhat similar picture. According to a fragment by Hierocles (*LS* 57G) from the second century AD, we humans are "encompassed by many circles" enclosing each other, and consisting of closer and more remote families, relatives, local residents,

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