Introduction

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Though it is certainly possible to exaggerate the marginalization of ethics within the historiography of medieval philosophy (and of medieval ethics within the historiography of philosophical ethics generally), it is fair to say that more general histories tend not quite to do justice either to the proportion of their attention that the medievals gave to ethics or to the creativity and fecundity of medieval ethical thought. This volume is intended to help remedy that deficit.

The first section offers an overview of the history of ethical thought in the period. The history of ethics in the Latin West is divided into three chapters. In Chapter 1, "From Augustine to Eriugena," Erik Kenyon emphasizes the eminently practical character of ethical thought in the early medieval period, which sought to reorient human lives around eternal goods. He gives attention to formal, structural characteristics of such works as Augustine's *Confessions* and Boethius's *Consolation of Philosophy*, because in that period literary structure so often carried philosophical meaning. Moving from the ninth century to the eleventh, Ian Wilks in Chapter 2, "From Anselm to Albert the Great," charts the development of ethical thought away from the first-personal reflections characteristic of early medieval thinkers to the kind of scholastic thought that would characterize the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Thinkers in this middle period developed complex accounts of the structure of moral acts and reflected on the relationship between Christian law and natural law. This is the period in which Peter Abelard developed a provocative version of Augustinian ethics and Peter Lombard produced the *Four Books of Sentences*, which would become a standard textbook in the centuries to come. The chapter ends with Albert the Great, who would exercise great influence not

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only as an early exponent of Aristotle but as the teacher of Thomas Aquinas. In Chapter 3, "From Thomas Aquinas to the 1350s," Eric W. Hagedorn provides an overview of Aquinas's moral theory that focuses on his account of natural law and his theory of the virtues, as well as the way in which he develops the account of the structure of moral acts that we saw developing already in Chapter 2. After a judicious account of the Condemnation of 1277 and its influence on later thinking, Hagedorn examines three key debates that took place in its aftermath: the question of the modal status of moral truths, debates on the nature of virtue, and the dispute over Franciscan poverty.

In Chapter 4, "Islamic Ethics," Jon McGinnis offers an overview of the ethical systems of Islamic philosophy and theology from roughly 850 to 1200. He examines metaethics and moral psychology, philosophical systems that emphasize virtue and happiness, and theological questions about whether reason unaided by revelation can discern moral duty and whether one can rightly speak of natural law in the context of Islam. Similar questions arise in the context of Chapter 5, "Ethics in Medieval Jewish Philosophy," in which T. M. Rudavsky explores the ways in which Jewish thinkers creatively appropriated Aristotelian eudaimonism and virtue ethics. The term "natural law" is not much used within Jewish ethics in this period, but many of the topics related to natural law do receive extensive discussion: the nature of reason, the relation between reason and revelation, and the question of whether moral duties can be discovered by reason alone.

The second section turns to concepts and themes of central importance in the period. It begins with chapters on three central organizing concepts in medieval thought: happiness, virtue, and law. In Chapter 6, "Happiness," Jeff Steele sets out Aristotle's formal conditions for happiness and shows how Augustine, Boethius, and Thomas Aquinas all accept that formal account of happiness and agree that happiness as thus described is obtainable only in the next life, but have different ways of elaborating their substantive views of happiness. He then turns to John Duns Scotus, who breaks with

the consensus of his predecessors by separating happiness from morality. Finally, he considers the debate over whether happiness belongs primarily to the intellect or to the will. Thomas M. Osborne, Jr., examines another central concept in Chapter 7, "Virtue." Medieval thinkers drew on scriptural, patristic, and classical sources in developing their accounts of the virtues. Osborne considers especially the classification of the virtues, including the role of the cardinal virtues, the connection of the virtues, and debates over which psychological faculties the virtues belonged to. In Chapter 8, "Law," Jean Porter examines scholastic accounts of natural law and natural right. She considers both theoretical issues about the relationship between reason and revelation (with human reason and Scripture being "complementary and mutually interpreting") and the practical use of accounts of law to critique both civil and ecclesiastical institutions and social practices. She gives particular attention to debates over the institution of private property and the implications of natural law for sexual morality.

The next four chapters concern moral psychology, broadly construed. In Chapter 9, "Freedom without Choice: Medieval Theories of the Essence of Freedom," Tobias Hoffmann notes that although most medieval authors agreed that we have the freedom to choose between alternatives, many of them also thought that there are situations in which we will freely even though we cannot will otherwise than we do. What, then, is the essential nature of freedom, if it is not the power to choose between alternatives? Hoffmann lays out the Augustinian background of this question and then examines key thirteenth- and fourteenth-century contributions to this debate. In Chapter 10, "Practical Reasoning," M. V. Dougherty examines views about the reasoning by which we come to know how we ought to act, and the sources of error and confusion that hinder such knowledge. He also examines the hotly contested question of whether any agent can be genuinely *perplexus*, that is, in a situation in which there are no morally permissible options open to the agent (in today's language, whether there are any genuine moral dilemmas).

In Chapter 11, "Will and Intellect," I argue that there is no stable meaning of *voluntas* (will) across the period and consider different characterizations of *voluntas* from Augustine through William of Ockham. I then turn to thirteenth- and fourteenth-century debates over the respective roles of will and intellect in the process of action. In Chapter 12, "Emotions," Martin Pickavé examines the emotions or passions: their nature, the psychological faculty or faculties in which they are located, their contribution to the process of action, whether there are basic or fundamental emotions, and the extent to which the passions are subject to rational control and therefore potentially praiseworthy or blameworthy.

The volume concludes with four chapters that emphasize the ethical dimension of mystical practice, the moral significance of economic activity, the individual's relation to the common good, and the influence of the theological categories of sin and grace on philosophical ethics. In Chapter 13, "Medieval Islamic and Christian Mysticism and the Problem of a 'Mystical Ethics,'" Amber Griffioen and Mohammad Sadegh Zahedi argue that mystical traditions are often oriented around recognizably ethical concerns: an account of the highest good and a path for achieving union with or closeness to it, and discussions of virtues and vices, goodness and perfection. Even apophaticism (the view that nothing affirmative can be said truly of God) and antinomianism (the view of some mystics that they are not subject to ordinary laws or norms of behavior) can, when viewed in the context of the larger mystical project, be seen not as challenges to the very possibility of ethics but as contributions to a distinctive mystical ethics. In Chapter 14, "Economic Ethics," Roberto Lambertini examines ethical concerns with economic practices. He shows how changing social and political arrangements affected thinking about the licitness of private property, the virtues and vices that can be manifested in economic exchange and the acquisition of wealth, and arguments for and against the charging of interest and making a return on investments. In Chapter 15, "Self-Interest, Self-Sacrifice, and the Common Good," John Marenbon considers both

psychological egoism (the view that human beings are motivated exclusively by self-interest) and ethical egoism (the view that human beings *ought* to be motivated exclusively by self-interest) in light of discussions of the possibility and rationality of self-sacrifice for the common good. Marenbon examines the lively disputes about these matters both before and after the full text of Aristotle's *Ethics* became known, taking us from Abelard and Heloise in the twelfth century all the way to Lorenzo Valla in the fifteenth century and Pietro Pomponazzi in the sixteenth. In Chapter 16, "Sin and Grace," Eileen C. Sweeney examines how the concept of sin shapes both the formal character of moral action – the nature of moral action and the locus of moral worth – and its material character – what counts as sin and how that differs from vice. She concludes by examining how grace affects the notion of moral responsibility.

Many important themes recur in different contexts in such a way that the contributions complement each other without overlapping. For example, the question of the rational accessibility of morality arises in Christianity in Chapter 3, in Islam in Chapter 4, and in Judaism in Chapter 5; it recurs in Chapter 8's discussion of law and again in Chapter 14's discussion of whether the prohibition of usury can be known by reason or rests entirely on revelation. Happiness is the central concern of Chapter 6, but Chapters 1, 3, 4, and 5 also examine developing conceptions of happiness in the Christian, Islamic, and Jewish traditions, and Chapter 15 asks how (or whether) self-sacrifice can be justified in an ethic that takes happiness to be the ultimate goal of human life. The discussion of economic ethics in Chapter 14 is supplemented by the account of the debates over Franciscan poverty in Chapter 3 and natural-law reflections on the legitimacy of private property in Chapter 8. The important (and too-often neglected) role of canon and civil law in medieval ethical thought is highlighted in both Chapter 8 and Chapter 10. And the relationship between intellect and will is explored not only in Chapter 11 but also in discussions of moral psychology in Chapters 3 and 4, the debate in Chapter 6 over whether the intellect or the will

has primacy in happiness, and the discussion in Chapter 7 of the psychological location of the virtues.

It is our hope that this collection will provide an accessible and appealing way into the rich and varied debates within ethical theory that characterized the Middle Ages and demonstrate both the historical importance and the continuing philosophical relevance of this lively and engaging period in the history of philosophy.

PART I   **History**

1   From Augustine to Eriugena

Erik Kenyon

By the end of the Hellenistic period, pursuit of the good life had established itself as the main purpose of philosophy. Academic skeptics argued that each dogmatic school's thought hangs off its view of the human final end and then proceeded to attack all possible systems.[1] Stoics positioned ethics as the crowning gem of their curriculum. Epicureans went so far as to judge theories in physics by whether one could attain tranquility by accepting them. Augustine and Boethius are squarely rooted in this Hellenistic outlook, which makes living well the linchpin of all philosophical undertaking. Just as important was the idea that the best life for a human (Greek: *eudaimonia*; Latin: *beata vita*) is a matter of realizing our distinctively human nature. Within the domain of ethics, ideas about living well are ideas about human excellence or virtue (Gr.: *arete*; Lat.: *virtus*). These, in turn, are grounded in ideas of human nature within the domains of physics and psychology. While the various Hellenistic schools argued about the details, for the most part they all took this general framework for granted. When Augustine and Boethius depart from this Hellenistic rootstock, it is by grafting on Christian and Platonist ideas, which are sometimes hard to distinguish from each other. The result is a hybrid of sorts, a living system which is what the West later came to accept as Platonism. At the heart of this system is the notion that human beings are metaphysical straddlers: we have one foot in eternity and another in time. When it comes to the good life, the task is to live the best life *for us*, given the kind of thing we are. In practical terms, this calls us to reorient our lives around eternal norms, even amid the transient concerns of everyday life. The present chapter aims to orient readers to the early medieval

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project of using Hellenistic and Platonist frameworks to work out how Christians ought to live their lives as the created image of an eternal God. This interplay of time and eternity provides a thread through a maze of philosophical puzzles distinctive of this period: the problem of evil, fate vs. free will, temporal vs. eternal law, grades of virtue, theories of mind, and strategies for reading Scripture.

We will begin with Augustine of Hippo, who sets out this project, and Boethius, who refines it. We will then skip ahead to the Carolingian renaissance with Alcuin of York, who helped restart liberal learning, and Eriugena, whose encounter with the negative theology of Pseudo-Dionysius led him to reframe the Augustinian project, creating a bold new breed of Christian Platonism. Our period sits in the era between apologists fighting for Christianity's survival and scholastics seeking to refine and systematize centuries of classical, Arabic, and Christian thought. Ethical inquiry, particularly in these earlier centuries, is more concerned with self-reflection and spiritual exercise than demonstrative argument. It is more first-person than third-person (see Matthews 1992). What's more, frameworks and hierarchies that later medieval thinkers take for granted are still being put together. I take this to be a strength: insofar as these earlier thinkers are operating closer to the ground, it is easier to connect their work to issues today.[2]

1.1   AUGUSTINE

Augustine was born in the relative obscurity of provincial North Africa. Like Cicero before him, his skill for rhetoric carried him quickly to the center of political power, at that point the imperial court at Milan. Situated between Constantine's conversion and Justinian's theocracy, Augustine's Rome was still only partly Christianized. While Augustine looked to Ambrose as a role model for an educated Christian, it was Ambrose's rival in the Altar of Victory affair, Symmachus, who secured Augustine his position in Milan. At this point, the question was not *whether* Christianity was

here to stay, but what form it would take. Augustine's philosophical career was dominated by working out a synthesis of Christian faith and classical philosophy.

The first challenge in discussing Augustine's ethical thought is to determine what we should consider his "ethical works." As with the American Pragmatists, Augustine criticized pursuing knowledge for knowledge's sake (*Conf.* 10.35.54–57). Even his most tortured metaphysical speculations and antiquarian exegetical pursuits tie back, however indirectly, to improving how we live. So in one sense, we could look to *any* of Augustine's works for his ethical thought. Given that the corpus is huge – dialogues, letters, sermons, scriptural commentaries, autobiography, polemics – I will narrow my focus to those works that readers of the present volume are likely to be most interested in. Yet this raises a second challenge: if we use current assumptions about what counts as "ethical thought" to guide our selection, we risk giving a skewed version of earlier figures' work. Modern ethics tends to focus on the rightness or wrongness of particular actions; ancient and medieval ethics tend to focus on the goodness or badness of lives. This difference, however, can be put to good use, as it allows us to augment current debates by setting them within more holistic discussions from the past. I will thus focus on aspects of early medieval thought that differ most from our own. This raises the third challenge: differences often sit not at the level of individual claims or arguments but in the overarching projects of whole works. We must set individual passages within their larger contexts, engaging in something closer to formal, literary analysis than might be usual for some philosophers. Put another way, to see what is characteristic of Augustine, we must ask not merely what he *thinks* but what he is *doing* with those thoughts.[3]

1.1.1   De libero arbitrio

The deep structure of *De lib. arbit.* is built around the idea that not all goods are of equal value. (See Harrison 2006 for a close reading of *De lib. arbit.*) Augustine helps clarify the relative worth of things by