Introduction

The reintroduction of Aristotle into the Latin West in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries gave rise to the most innovative theories of free will in the later Middle Ages. The rediscovery of Aristotle's action theory caused a psychological turn in reflection upon free will: the emphasis shifted from a narrow focus on the relation of free will and sin to the philosophical problem of how free agency is rooted in the powers of the soul. The existence of free will as the basis for the moral responsibility implied in sin was no longer taken for granted on theological grounds, but rather investigated within a philosophical account of action.

The reception of Aristotle's action theory by thinkers of the Latin tradition started in the 1220s, without at first causing any concern. But beginning in the 1260s, some thinkers who followed Aristotle more systematically, especially Thomas Aquinas and Siger of Brabant, prompted strong reactions. According to an Aristotelian action theory, our choices necessarily follow our judgments of what is worth choosing, and bad choices presuppose faulty judgments. But some theologians feared that such a theory threatens free will, for it seems that we do not control what appears to us as worth choosing. Also, moral fault or sin, consisting in a morally reprehensible act, is a voluntary failure; but a miscalculation of what is choiceworthy is an involuntary failure. Medieval thinkers continued to agree about the existence of free will, but began to debate passionately about the relations between cognition and volition, and between faulty cognition and evildoing.

The Scope of This Study

The purpose of this book is to discuss free will theories in the first hundred years of the reception of Aristotle's action theory by thinkers belonging to the Latin tradition. Islamic and Jewish medieval thinkers, and those of the Byzantine tradition, are beyond the scope of this book, so when I write "medieval," I normally intend "Latin medieval." For background, the book

studies theoretical presuppositions of the later medieval accounts of free will in the thought of Aristotle, Augustine, Anselm of Canterbury, and others. But the core of the book concerns theories developed between the 1220s and the early 1320s, and thus focuses on some pioneers of the reception of Aristotle's action theory (such as William of Auxerre, Philip the Chancellor, and Albert the Great), the "big names" in the free will debate (Thomas Aquinas, Henry of Ghent, Giles of Rome, Godfrey of Fontaines, Duns Scotus, and William of Ockham), and some thinkers who are less known today, but important in their time (such as John of Pouilly and Peter Auriol).

After the psychological turn, the central issue became the relation between intellect and will. Particular attention was given to the relation between the cognition of a desirable object and its volition and that between cognitive and volitional deficiencies, that is, between error, ignorance, or nonconsideration and an evil will. The concern was to explain control and moral responsibility through a psychologically plausible and metaphysically robust theory. Aristotle became a resource for later medieval theories of free will not only regarding his action theory, but also his psychology, natural philosophy, and metaphysics.

The questions Christian theologians had to address were more radical, however, than those tackled by Aristotle. While Aristotle holds that all evildoers are in some sense ignorant of the good, Christian theologians must explain how persons who do not suffer ignorance can do evil. While Aristotle explains that we can act against our better judgment because occurrent passions interfere with practical thinking, Christian theologians must explain that persons possessing unflawed knowledge and lacking passions can do evil. Whereas Aristotle holds that vicious dispositions (*habitus*), acquired perhaps because of lack of proper moral education, can distort our understanding of what is worth pursuing, Christian thinkers have to explain how persons without bad dispositions can do evil. Furthermore, Aristotle assumes that the universe has no temporal beginning, and so in his view, evil has always existed. Christian theologians, by contrast, assume that the universe has a temporal beginning, that originally all persons were good, but that some sinned while others did not. Finally, Aristotle holds that repeated bad action generates a persistent vice that makes the individual prone to act badly. Christian theologians assumed that a single act can make persons permanently unable to avoid sinning. According to Christian theology, these persons who do evil despite their optimal psychological conditions and who after a single act are beyond the possibility of moral reform are the rebel angels.

This book aims at presenting the medieval free will debate according to the breadth of the thinkers' own interests. For the medievals, a theory of free will must not only account for the ability to choose one's acts, but also explain how an entirely good person can want to commit an evil act for the first time. It must explain this not only for human beings, but also for angels, who act under optimal psychological conditions. Part of the explanation must be an account of the person's control of the acts – especially in the case of sin, for "sin" means a morally deficient act for which the agent is responsible. For medieval thinkers, sin is not the paradigm case of a free act, since ideally, free will involves the inability to sin. Nevertheless, in their view, the possibility of a good creature sinning for the first time, and the particular problem of angelic sin, are important test cases for the robustness of their theories of free will. The hypothesis of the first choice of the angels allows them to focus exclusively on the interaction of intellect and will, for it results only from thinking and willing some object. Thus this hypothesis prompted thinkers to refine their theories of free will, just as philosophers today employ thought experiments to test commonly accepted opinions and develop innovative ideas.[1] Aristotle would have considered the hypothesis of a deficient act of purely intellectual beings absurd.[2] Nevertheless, the various philosophical difficulties implied in the Christian understanding of the sin of the angels induced the medievals, with some delay, to treat Aristotle as an important source, leading them to take a more philosophical approach to angelic sin than before.

For medieval theologians, angels were no side issue. Particular assumptions about angels were thought to have implications for wider philosophical and theological issues. This explains, for example, why in an important ecclesial condemnation in 1277, more than one-sixth of 219 censured philosophical propositions has to do with angels or "intelligences" (the philosophers' term). Accordingly, in the last thirty years, scholars have been increasingly interested in philosophical issues raised within medieval discussions of angels, especially in natural philosophy, metaphysics, and theory of knowledge.[3] By contrast, little attention has been given to medieval discussions of angelic sin.

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[1] Perler 2008 shows that many medieval discussions of angels have the character of thought experiments.

[2] According to Aristotle, separate substances are unchangeable (*Met.* XII.8, 1073a32–4). They are eternal and therefore fully actual and indefectible (*Met.* IX.9, 1051a19–21). Later medieval authors are aware that Aristotle considers the fall of separate substances impossible; see, e.g., William of Auvergne, *De universo* II.2.40, I: 884aE; Thomas Aquinas, *ST* I.63.1 arg. 1; Godfrey of Fontaines, *Quodl.* VI.7, III: 168.

[3] See especially Suarez-Nani 2002a and 2002b, Lenz and Iribarren eds. 2008, and Hoffmann ed. 2012.

There are three questions in particular that traverse this book. First, do the medieval thinkers' theoretical presuppositions allow them to explain that persons control their acts? Second, to what extent do they trace a freely made choice to its causes? In other words, do they consider a free choice to be ultimately explainable? Third, do they admit the possibility of "clear-eyed evildoing," that is, of doing evil in full awareness that it is evil, including awareness of the negative impact on oneself? I contend that to account for control, all medieval thinkers studied here hold, or at least concede implicitly, that freely chosen acts cannot be fully traced to cognition and are therefore explainable only up to a certain point. By the same token, an evil choice cannot be sufficiently explained by a cognitive disorder. Nevertheless, most authors think something goes wrong with cognition when someone sins, and so they do not allow for clear-eyed evildoing.

To provide background, it is worth offering a few general philosophical and historical considerations concerning free will, followed by an account of the narrative of the fall of the angels that was presupposed in later medieval theories of angelic sin.

Free Will in a Broad and in a Narrow Sense

So far, I have employed exclusively the term "free will," which is also used, albeit somewhat differently, in contemporary philosophy. Medieval thinkers use the corresponding Latin term, *libera voluntas*, or *libertas voluntatis*, freedom of the will. But they also use the expression *liberum arbitrium* – free decision (literally "free adjudication"). Sometimes, they employ these expressions interchangeably, at other times they give them distinct meanings. Two important meanings stand out, depending on which conditions for free will are met. One condition is that an act have its source in the agent's intellect and will. Borrowing from contemporary parlance, I call this the "sourcehood condition" of free will.

Sourcehood condition: An act is free only if the agent is the source of the act through intellect and will.

This formulation leaves open how an act must originate in intellect and will to meet the sourcehood condition. Some medieval thinkers specify that the will must be the source of one's act without being determined by the intellect. For others, cognitive determination is what alone makes willing possible. So for some, the sourcehood condition involves above all certain cognitive conditions (cognizing an object in a particular way), for others certain volitional conditions (the will moving itself in light of

a cognized object). They agree, however, that the sourcehood condition involves absence of external coercion. They also agree that acts originating in the sensory appetite, such as unthinkingly scratching one's beard, are not done by free will, even though they are done voluntarily, without coercion.

Another condition is what contemporary philosophers call the "leeway condition."

Leeway condition: An act is free only if the agent has alternative possibilities and is the source of the alternative he or she chooses.

Medieval thinkers generally hold that free will in the broad sense requires only sourcehood and is thus compatible with the inability to do otherwise, while free will in the narrow sense requires, in addition to sourcehood, also the ability to choose among alternatives. They also widely hold that moral responsibility presupposes not only sourcehood, but also leeway.

Intellectualism and Voluntarism

Once the medieval theologians' interest shifts to the psychological foundation of free will, the question becomes for them whether sourcehood and leeway are grounded more in the intellect or in the will. Interpreters often use the labels "intellectualism" and "voluntarism" to distinguish between these approaches to free will. These labels run the risk of oversimplification, and some scholars have argued that they are to be avoided altogether. Yet as we will see, particularly in the debate after Aquinas, the difference of emphasis on either the intellect or the will as the ultimate foundation of free will is so pronounced that these different approaches deserve a name. Nevertheless, medieval theories do not fall into two monolithic camps. There is much variety, especially among voluntarist thinkers, but also among intellectualists. There are also a number of thinkers who develop intermediate positions. It shall suffice to offer broad definitions of intellectualism and voluntarism, which allow for further specification once the details of the corresponding views become clear.

Intellectualism: the theory that explains free agency mainly with reference to the intellect.

Voluntarism: the theory that explains free agency mainly with reference to the will.

Medieval thinkers consistently held that, properly speaking, it is not the intellect and will that act, but rather the person who acts by intellect and

will. Nevertheless, once the emphasis is on the relative contributions of intellect and will in free agency, it becomes convenient to speak loosely as if the intellect knows, understands, considers, judges, and deliberates, and the will desires, chooses, and enjoys. The medievals often use this language, and I too will occasionally adopt this way of speaking in expounding their views.

The Narrative of Angelic Sin

Sacred Scripture contains quite little about the sin of the angels, yet medieval theologians write rather profusely on it. Allegorical interpretations, validated by authoritative glosses by Church Fathers, expand the number of pertinent scriptural passages. Some difficulties in knowing specific aspects of the fall of the angels are bypassed when the question is not whether and how the fall actually happened, but whether and how it *could* happen. The fact of angelic sin is a theological question the study of which relies on revelation; its possibility – that is, whether its assumption is noncontradictory and coherent with other assumptions to which medieval thinkers are committed – is a philosophical problem and hence can be investigated apart from revelation. Finally, some theologians even provide empirical evidence for the existence of evil angels: idolatry, magic, demonic possession, and the experience of temptation. On the assumption that God created all things good, the existence of evil angels implies that some sinned.[4]

As a basis for their reflections about the sin of the angels, later medieval thinkers adopted for the most part the narrative that Peter Lombard formulated in his *Sentences* (composed in different redactions in the mid-twelfth century).[5] The *Sentences*, which mainly consist in a collection of authoritative statements by Church Fathers, were highly influential because by the 1240s they became the obligatory theology textbook. Becoming a master in theology required lecturing on the *Sentences*, and routinely, theologians published their revised lectures in works that have come to be called *Sentences* commentaries.[6]

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[4] See William of Auvergne, *De universo* II.2.39, I: 882bF–883bD; Albert the Great, *In Sent.* II.5.1 s.c. 1, Borgnet XXVII: 111a; Bonaventure, *In Sent.* II.6.2.1 arg. 2 in opp. and *c.*, II: 164a–b; Peter Olivi, *Summa* II.43*c.*, I: 716.

[5] For recent research concerning the composition and dating of the *Sentences*, see Clark 2019, 240–6.

[6] An expression not used by the medievals themselves, for their lectures were not commentaries on Lombard's text, but rather discussions of its themes, often with no connection to Lombard; see Schabel 2020.

While patristic authors disagreed concerning particular aspects of the angelic fall, Lombard proposed a coherent narrative that selects certain of the Fathers' specific interpretations of Sacred Scripture, favoring above all Augustine's. By the second half of the twelfth century, theologians widely accepted Lombard's narrative,[7] and they framed most of the questions they debated about the fall according to the themes covered in the *Sentences*.

Lombard follows Augustine in reading the first verse of the Bible, "in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth," to mean that the angels ("the heavens") were created at the same time as the material universe (*Sent.* II.2.1.3–4, I: 336–7). They were created in a place: the highest heaven of the material universe, the *empyreum*, that is, the fiery heaven (*Sent.* II.2.4 nn. 2–3, I: 339–40). Lombard can thus understand the "fall" of the evil angels not only as their act of sin, but also as their consequent fall from heaven to earth, more precisely, "into this misty air" from which they now tempt humans.[8] After the Last Judgment, the evil angels will be hurled into hell (*Sent.* II.6.2–3, I: 355–6).

The angels have intellect and will as well as free decision (*liberum arbitrium*), but they were not all created equal, and hence they do not enjoy these powers to the same degree (*Sent.* II.3.2–3, I: 342–3). All angels were created good, and, at least for a short interval, all remained good (*Sent.* II.3.4, I: 343–7). In that interval, they did not enjoy complete beatitude – they did not yet enjoy the beatific vision of seeing God directly – but they did not experience any misery either (*Sent.* II.4, I: 348–51). With their first act of free decision, some adhered to God out of love and obtained the grace of being "confirmed" in the good, whereas others committed the sins of pride and envy and fell from heaven (*Sent.* II.3.4 n. 5, I: 344–5; II.5.1, I: 351). Their choice had a permanent effect: thanks to the grace of confirmation, the good angels became unable to sin, whereas the bad angels – who now "were made demons" – became obstinate, that is, permanently unable to have a good will (*Sent.* II.7.1, I: 359; II.7.3 n. 2, I: 360).

Lucifer, the highest angel, is presented as the first angel to sin, while other angels consented to his sin and fell together with him (*Sent.* II.6.2 n. 1, I: 355). Lombard follows a patristic tradition in interpreting

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[7] See Colish 1995, 91.

[8] Lombard inherits the twofold meaning of the fall of the angels from Augustine; for the fall as the sin of the angels, see, e.g., *Gn. litt.* XI.16, CSEL XXVIII/1: 349 l. 2; *ciu.* XII.9, CCSL XLVIII: 364 l. 49; for the fall as the fall from heaven, see, e.g., *Gn. litt.* XI.13 and XI.14, p. 346 ll. 1–2 and l. 17; *ciu.* XI.14, p. 346 l. 16; *ciu.* XIV.11, p. 432 l. 56. See also *lib. arb.* II.20.54.205 and *Gn. litt.* IV.9, p. 105 l. 20, where "fall" denotes human sin.

a passage by Isaiah (14: 12–14) to mean that Lucifer sinned by desiring equality with God.

<p style="text-align:center">* * *</p>

Part I provides an account of major theories of free will from the 1220s to the early 1320s and clarifies their historical presuppositions. Chapter 1 sketches the theories of free will by Anselm of Canterbury, Bernard of Clairvaux, and Peter Lombard, which remained points of reference after the psychological turn. It also presents the Aristotelian ideas that impacted later theories of free will. Chapter 2 concerns the psychological turn itself, initiated especially by Philip the Chancellor and brought to maturity by Thomas Aquinas. From the 1220s onward, almost all theologians consider Aristotle a crucial authority regarding free agency, but they differ substantially in their appropriation of key Aristotelian positions. Some thinkers, such as Thomas Aquinas, Siger of Brabant, and Godfrey of Fontaines, follow him more closely and develop intellectualist accounts of free will: they bind volitions tightly to practical knowledge, see freedom rooted primarily in the intellect, and hold that evil willing presupposes deficient cognition (error, ignorance, or inattention). To some theologians, however, a tight connection between intellect and will implies intellectual determinism and hence the loss of free will – at least of free will in the narrow sense. Furthermore, tracing an evil will to faulty cognition would mean reducing moral evil to making a mistake. To avoid such implications, Henry of Ghent, Franciscan thinkers, and many others take a voluntarist approach, seeing freedom as rooted primarily in the will. Thus, decidedly voluntarist theories of free will develop in reaction to Aquinas, Siger, and Godfrey. Ecclesiastical condemnations in 1277 critique intellectualist propositions and thereby deepen the divisions. Some thinkers, such as Giles of Rome and John of Morrovalle, try to mediate between these extremes. Chapter 3 is dedicated to voluntarism and Chapter 4 to intermediary theories and strict intellectualism. Chapter 5 studies the theories developed in the next generation, by Duns Scotus and William of Ockham (who are both voluntarists), John of Pouilly, Hervaeus Natalis, and Durand of St. Pourçain (who are intellectualists), and Peter Auriol (who proposes an intermediary theory).

The topic of Part II is the first cause of evil. Chapter 6 studies the accounts of Augustine and Pseudo-Dionysius, which were constant points of reference for later medieval theories. Chapter 7 discusses the theories from Anselm of Canterbury to John of Pouilly. Despite important differences, all thinkers converge on the idea that a perverse choice lacks an ultimate explanation, and among those who discussed the cause of evil

from the perspective of the relation of intellect and will, there is more or less open agreement that an evil choice cannot be fully traced to an act of the intellect.

Part III studies philosophical explanations of angelic sin. Chapters 8 and 9 examine the interplay of intellect and will, and of cognitive and volitional deficiencies, in the angelic fall. Chapter 8 is dedicated to intellectualist accounts, according to which a cognitive deficiency precedes an evil will; Chapter 9 studies voluntarist and intermediary accounts, both of which emphasize that the angels' will was deficient before their cognition was flawed. Chapter 10 examines theories of the fallen angels' or demons' so-called obstinacy, that is, their inability to change their mind and repent. Theologians generally agreed that demonic obstinacy had an external cause: God condemns them to their permanent evil state and refuses to grant the grace of reconciliation. But many thinkers tried to assign, in addition, an internal, psychological cause that explains why the angels cannot change their thinking and willing. Since voluntarists emphasize the will's causal independence, many of them denied that the demons' obstinacy had an internal cause, and some went very far in assigning to God an active role in their permanent evil will.

Several studies cover certain aspects of later medieval theories of free will, but many are limited to only a few thinkers and to particular texts. Also, studies on free will are usually limited to the thirteenth century, and those concerning the fourteenth century gravitate toward Scotus and Ockham.[9] Medieval theories of the first cause of evil have received little scholarly attention, with the notable exception of Aquinas's theory.[10] The problems of angelic sin and demonic obstinacy have been studied more widely, but scholarly interest has focused on Aquinas, Scotus, and Ockham.[11] By examining well-known and neglected thinkers concerning a broad spectrum of issues connected to free will, the present study aims to provide a thorough introduction to the later medieval free will debate.

[9] For medieval theories of free will, see Lottin 1957a (from Anselm of Canterbury to the late thirteenth century), Müller 2009, parts IV–VI (from Anselm to Duns Scotus, in connection with the study of incontinence), and Stadter 1971 (on Franciscan thinkers from Bonaventure to Scotus). For the last three decades of the thirteenth century, see San Cristóbal-Sebastián 1958 (which is not always reliable), Kent 1995, ch. 3, and Putallaz 1995. See also Irwin 2007, chs. 18, 25, and 27 (on Aquinas, Scotus, and Ockham) and Perler 2020, chs. 5–6 (on Aquinas, Peter Olivi, Henry of Ghent, and Ockham). For free will in Franciscan thinkers of the early fourteenth century, see Alliney 2015 and his articles indicated there on p. 272, note 3.

[10] Studies of Aquinas's account are indicated in Chapter 7, note 19.

[11] An overview of later medieval theories of angelic sin is found in Hoffmann 2012c. See also D'Ercole 2017, who studies the theories of angelic sin by Thomas Aquinas, Peter Olivi, and Richard of Menneville (Mediavilla). References to further literature will be given in Part III.

PART I

Free Will