

WEAKNESS OF THE WILL IN RENAISSANCE AND REFORMATION

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In spite of the philosophical richness of the scholastic discussion around Aristotle's *akrasia*, the format and the external limits of this discussion remain remarkably coherent. The medieval commentaries on the *Nicomachean Ethics* (EN) between Albert the Great and John Buridan expose Aristotle's text and, in addition, ask a rather standard set of questions. This stable format enables the commentators to define their position in the tradition of philosophical Aristotelianism with great precision. In addition to this Aristotelian framework, we see the influence of Christian Augustinianism at work. But even so, the scholastic interpreters are only concerned with two conceptual systems, namely, Latin Aristotelianism and Christian Augustinianism.¹

In Renaissance and Reformation, several new factors begin to interact with this old format. First, Aristotle's text is no more looked only in terms of its philosophical content, but humanist expositors discuss the philological background of Greek terms. Second, they often aim at commenting the text with regard to pedagogical clarity rather than philosophical sophistication. Third, although Aristotle remains authoritative, he is extensively compared with other philosophical and literary texts of classical antiquity, for instance with Plato, Cicero, Seneca and with poets like Ovid. Fourth, the background of theological controversies becomes more complex. Especially in the Reformation, Aristotle is read with the help of Calvin or Luther at the same time when he is exposed in humanist or philosophical fashion. Fifth, new literary genres, for instance dictionaries and short textbooks, but also large monographs on ethics, integrate Aristotelian topics into their presentation.²

For these reasons, it is extremely difficult and laborious to outline a comprehensive picture of how Aristotle's *akrasia* was treated after John Buridan's times. Much of the background work still remains to be done. My presentation will consist of three parts. First (1.) I will outline the treatment of *akrasia* in Renaissance Italy until 1500, using Donatus Acciaiuolus's commentary on *Ethics* as my main source. The second (2.) and longest part of my paper will concern the Central European discussion on *akrasia* from 1500 until about 1630, that is, from Faber Stapulensis's writings to the publication of the massive ethics textbook of Wolfgang Heider at the university of Jena in 1628. In the last part (3.) of my paper I will briefly investigate Martin Luther's contribution to our topic.

Although I think that this choice is to an extent representative of my general theme, it is nevertheless highly selective. It should be pointed out immediately that I will leave out at least two major areas of discussion. The first gap has to do with the Central European ethical texts written between John Buridan and Faber Stapulensis. These sources are for the most part only available as manuscripts. Although they have recently begun to receive scholarly

¹ For the medieval discussion, cf. Risto Saarinen, *Weakness of the Will in Medieval Thought: From Augustine to Buridan*. Leiden: Brill 1994; *ibid.*, *Weakness of Will: The Plurality of Medieval Explanations*, in: Henrik Lagerlund and Mikko Yrjönsuuri (ed.) *Emotions and Choice from Boethius to Descartes*. Dordrecht: Kluwer 2002, 85-97; *ibid.*, *The Parts of Prudence: Buridan, Odonis, Aquinas*, in: *Dialogue* 42, 2003, 749-765.

² Recent studies in this field include David Lines, *Aristotle's Ethics in the Italian Renaissance (ca. 1300-1650)*, Leiden: Brill 2002; Christoph Strohm, *Ethik im frühen Calvinismus*, Berlin: de Gruyter 1996; Jill Krayer and Risto Saarinen (eds.), *Moral Philosophy on the Threshold of Modernity*, Dordrecht: Kluwer, forthcoming 2004/5.

attention, much work remains to be done before they can be properly evaluated.³ The other lacuna of my study concerns the Southern European and other distinctively Catholic sources composed after 1500. With regard to these texts, David Lines's new study gives a lot of important materials. For instance, Francesco Piccolomini's *Universa philosophia de moribus* (1583) was influential in the whole Europe, including the Protestant universities.⁴

1. Thomas's Akrasia: Italian Renaissance until 1500

The treatment of Aristotelian ethics in the Italian Renaissance between 1350 and 1500 was not very innovative. The views put forward by the great commentators of the 13th and the 14th centuries were extensively received, taught and discussed, but seldom challenged philosophically. This is in brief what David A. Lines claims in his new study on the teaching of Aristotle's *Ethics* in the Italian Renaissance. According to him, the late fourteenth century commentators for the most part repeated Aquinas's views.⁵ Although other voices began to make themselves heard during the fifteenth century, commentaries on EN to an astonishing amount simply followed Aquinas in their philosophical content. This is remarkable, since new translations, new commentary genres and humanist Latin style flourished in Renaissance Italy. But in spite of many humanist innovations, the scholastic doctrines, in particular those of Thomas Aquinas, continued to be taught in the Italian commentaries. Lines shows this to be the case, for instance, in Niccolo Tignosi's ethical works.⁶

Although the Italian writers knew most medieval commentaries, it is Aquinas whom they constantly prefer. Buridan, for instance, was only moderately influential in Italy.⁷ One reason for this may be that Thomism came to be supplemented with humanistic approaches without a period of nominalism or *via moderna*. It may further be remarked that in spite of humanism, the fifteenth century Italian works on Aristotle's ethics did not make much effort to discuss philology or the Greek wordings. According to Lines, the first commentator who really attempted to do this was Angelo Poliziano in the 1490s.⁸ For these reasons, the period between 1350 and 1490 was not very interesting for the study of philosophical ethics.

David Lines's work is restricted to Italy, but other recent studies, for instance by Luca Bianchi, Jill Krave and Eckart Kessler, have presented similar results concerning the European reception of Aristotle's ethics. Krave and Kessler have come to the conclusion that the new translation of EN by Johannes Argyropoulos, accompanied with the commentary of Donatus Acciaiuolus, actually did not make any big difference in the reception history. They argue that the first humanist commentary to give a new direction to ethics was only

³ In addition to Jerzy Rebeta, *Komentarz Pawła z Worczyna do "Etyki Nikomachejskiej" Ariystotelesa z 1424 roku*, Wrocław 1970, see especially the extensive recent work by Mieczysław Markowski and Bénédicte Sère, as reported in: *Bulletin de Philosophie Médiévale* 43, 2001, 95-96 and 44, 2002, 14-15, 204.

⁴ Lines 2002 discusses Piccolomini on pp. 254-288. In the Frankfurt 1594 edition of *Universa philosophia de moribus*, Piccolomini treats akrasia in *gradus tertius*, cap. XIII-XXI, pp. 252-268. See also below, footnote 51.

⁵ Lines 2002, 173.

⁶ Lines 2002, 214-217.

⁷ See David Lines, *Sources and Authorities for Moral Philosophy in the Italian Renaissance: Thomas Aquinas and Jean Buridan on Aristotle's Ethics*, in: Krave-Saarinen (forthcoming).

⁸ Lines 2002, 101-102.

completed by Faber Stapulensis in 1497.⁹ These new studies have not dealt with akrasia in particular, but we may assume that much of their results can be applied to the treatment of weakness of the will.

This assumption can be tested by looking at one of the most widespread 15th century commentaries, namely the *Expositio super libros Ethicorum Aristotelis* by Donatus Acciaiuolus. The author, who participated in the Platonic Academy of Florence, uses the new translation of Johannes Argyropoulos. His commentary nevertheless often follows Aquinas's *Sententia libri Ethicorum*. The greater length of Acciaiuolus's comments is not due to new philosophical arguments. Whereas Aquinas exposes the text in a comprise and rigid manner, Acciaiuolus presents Aquinas's view with a more comprehensive humanist Latin, illustrating the case with new examples, but basically following Aquinas's interpretation of Aristotle.

Aquinas's basic view in *Sententia libri Ethicorum* is that the incontinent person in some way overlooks the minor premise of practical syllogism. Thus the akratic person's mistake resembles the shortcomings of logical reasoning. The mistake is fundamentally an ignorance of particular facts caused by a vehement passion which draws the attention of the akratic away from proper facts. Since the minor premise is to an extent ignored, the right action does not emerge as a conclusion of practical syllogism, even if the knowledge of the major premise remains in the mind of the akratic person.¹⁰

Acciaiuolus illustrates Thomas's with a non-Aristotelian example of theoretical syllogism: (1) all rhubarber cures cholera, (2) this is rhubarber, (3) this cures cholera. A person who knows (1), may nevertheless not identify some particular plant as rhubarber.¹¹ Concerning the practical syllogism, the conclusion is not a proposition but a corresponding action. If we say, using Aristotle's example (EN 1147a 27-33), that (1) everything sweet ought to be tasted and (2) this is sweet, the conclusion (3) should emerge as an act of tasting. It is not merely a propositional conclusion, but an executive act.¹² This view of Acciaiuolus follows closely the text of Aquinas, the basic difference being that Thomas says his opinion briefly, whereas

⁹ Jill Kraye, Renaissance Commentaries on the Nicomachean Ethics, in: *Vocabulary of Teaching and Research between Middle Ages and Renaissance*, ed. O. Weijers, Turnhout: Brepolis 1995, 96-117, here: 104; E. Kessler, Introducing Aristotle to the Sixteenth Century: The Lefevre Enterprise, in: *Philosophy in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*, ed. C. Blackwell and S. Susukawa, Aldershot 1999, 1-21. - Lines 2002, 17-18.

¹⁰ See e.g. *Sententia libri Ethicorum*, ed. Leonina, vol. 47, Vatican: Polyglot 1969, 393,10-27, and the broader discussion in Saarinen 1994, 118-131.

¹¹ Donatus Acciaiuolus, *Expositio super libros Ethicorum Aristotelis*, Venice 1565 (1st ed. 1478), 334.

¹² Acciaiuolus 1565, 335: "Verum sicut fit in speculativis, ita in activis, sed in speculativis hoc fit ut posita universali et particulari secundum formam syllogismi, necessario sequitur conclusio: sic in activis posita universali et singulari, statim sequitur operatio, quae est conclusio in activis, scilicet executio ipsa post discursionem facta, ut patet in hoc exemplo, ubi ponetur universalis opinio et particularis, ex quibus fit una tertia, id est conclusio et executio ipsa hoc modo: Omne dulce est gustandum, hoc est dulce, et statim fit executio et prosecutio illius quae est conclusio activa. Nam in speculativis satis est nosse conclusionem, sed in activis non tantum est conclusio quae infertur, sed etiam quae agitur, cum statim post discursionem illam fiat executio, et ista pcessio fieri videtur naturaliter in rebus agensi, licet non animadvertatur. Primo enim habemus aliquam cognitionem sub qua ponimus aliquam particularem, et postea infertur conclusio ex illis, id est operatio et executio, si non prohiberetur."

Acciaiuolus repeats it two or three times in different wordings and offers a new example.

After doing this, Acciaiuolus has a passage which does not correspond to Aquinas's exposition. But also here Acciaiuolus is actually presenting little more than a summary of the preceding passages. He says, like Thomas, that the knowledge of major premise is a *cognitio*, not a *scientia*, and that the incontinent person therefore does not know in any strict sense.¹³ But even these summarizing remarks are not in my view intended to present a new interpretation, but they intend to clarify the exposition presented by Aquinas.

In the exposition of Aristotle's solution (EN 1147b9-17), Acciaiuolus is again close to Aquinas. He says that Aristotle accommodates his view to the view of Socrates by concluding that the *scientia* concerning universals is immutable and thus cannot be overcome by passions. In this sense nobody can act against one's own knowledge. The incontinent person, however, does not have a sufficient knowledge of the minor premise of the practical syllogism. Acciaiuolus calls this minor premise a *domina rerum agendarum*, an expression not found in Aquinas. But the solution in itself matches Aquinas's view quite closely. Both teach that the incontinent person has lost some grasp of the minor premise.¹⁴ In many places, Acciaiuolus follows the phraseology of Aquinas quite closely.¹⁵ - Lines 2004, 19: "Acciaiuoli's commentary seems to have been written with Thomas's *Sententia* constantly at hand."

We may thus grant the conclusion of Lines and others, namely that new translations did not necessarily mean a great shift in philosophical interpretation. It is more surprising that the 13th century commentary of Thomas was still employed so unproblematically with the new translation of Argyropoulos. Acciaiuolus's commentary does not aim at presenting new philosophical views, but it offers the view of Thomas Aquinas in a polished Latin, offering new examples but basically repeating the old philosophical interpretation. In this way the scholastic philosophy, at least in some prominent cases, survived the new context of Renaissance.

2. Medea's Akrasia: From Faber Stapulensis to Wolfgang Heider (1500-1630)

Jacobus Lévefre d'Étaples, often called Faber Stapulensis, wrote two short but very influential expositions of Aristotle's ethics. His *Commentarii in X libros Ethicorum* (1st printing 1497) consists mainly of brief conclusions. The treatment of akrasia in this commentary is short and not very original. Like Acciaiuolus, Faber Stapulensis says that the minor premise of practical syllogism is the *domina ad agendum* which is "bound" in the moment of akratic action.¹⁶

¹³ Acciaiuolus 1565, 336: "Et cum dicimus incontinentem habere scientiam in habitu eo pacto et non actu, non sumimus scientiam proprie dictam, sed largo modo pro cognitione quadam quam ille habet universalis illius propositionis et huiusmodi." - For *cognitio* and *scientia* in Aquinas, see Saarinen 1994, 119.

¹⁴ Acciaiuolus 1565, 337-338.

¹⁵ Cf. e.g. Acciaiuolus 1565, 337: "... ex hoc emergit solutio dubitationis de scientia Socratis, duas diximus incontinentem habere propositiones, universalem et singularem, et haec ultima est rei sensibilis opinatio, quae dicitur *domina rerum agendarum*, quia actio est rerum singularium ..."

Cf. Thomas, *Sententia libri Ethicorum*, in VII,3,25: ... secundum praemissa solvit hanc rationem Socratis, et dicit, quod propositio et opinio ultima, scilicet singularis, accipitur per sensum et principiatur in actionibus quae sunt circa singularia."

¹⁶ Faber Stapulensis, *Comm. in Eth. VII, 3*, in: *Aristotelis X libros moralium tres*

Like Aquinas and Walter Burley, Faber here defends an intellectualistic view of akrasia, which comes close to the position of Socrates. The akratic person is not properly aware of the relevant facts concerning his action; he thus acts like a drunk or a confused person.¹⁷

Although Faber's discussion of akratic action does not offer much new, his exposition of EN VII contains methodical innovations. He first offers some *notae* in which he may discuss the Greek text. Often his notes also offer non-Aristotelian examples taken from classical literature. The notes are followed by a textual commentary which mainly consists of conclusions that illustrate Aristotle's position. Sometimes a corollary or a question is added, but questions are not treated in the scholastic manner. The only question related to akrasia is immediately responded: when it is asked how akratic person after his act regains his better knowledge, one can answer that the akratic phase resembles the natural transitory state of drunkenness or sleep.¹⁸

Concerning akrasia, Faber's methodical innovations yield more significant results in his other exposition, *Artificialis introductio in X libros Ethicorum* (1494), a brief text which was normally printed together with the commentary of Faber's student Josse Clichtove. In this exposition, basic moral concepts are exposed more or less in the order they appear in Aristotle's EN. Faber's introductory text remains very brief and rudimentary, but Clichtove's commentary enriches its philosophical content. The humanist method is especially visible through the variety of classical examples that Clichtove has collected. These non-Aristotelian *exempla* become applied to each basic concept introduced by Faber.

In discussing continence, Faber distinguishes among four basic modes or elements of akrasia, namely "*temerarii, infirmi, molles, delicati*".¹⁹ The second class, the weak persons, represents the most typical case of akrasia, in which the good intention becomes disturbed and is overcome by the passion. In Clichtove's commentary, the paradigmatic example of this basic type of akrasia is the Greek mythological figure Medea. The passions of her vehement love towards Jason cause her to abandon reason and follow the passion. To illustrate this change of mind, Clichtove quotes a long passage from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, in which Medea considers her actions. Clichtove has added to Ovid's text the abbreviations *Ra* and *Ap* in order to illustrate a dialogue between reason and appetite. For our study, the first five verses (*Metam.* 7,17-21) are especially relevant:²⁰ - English translation by Frank Miller,

conversiones, Paris 1505, n.p.: "Quamvis ligetur recta opinio universalis in incontinente, tanto magis ligatur singularis, quae domina est ad agendum."

¹⁷ Faber 1505, in *Eth.* VII, 3, n.p.: "Tertia conclusio. Quodammodo recte evenit quod Socrates investigabat, ut presente scientia non fiat incontinens. Nam cum recte rationis ultima propositio ac opinatio rei sit singularis, atque eadem actionum domina, aut hanc incontinens in perturbatione non habet, aut sic eam habet ut ligata ... Nam ea scientia, quae proprie scientia est, presente non sit perturbatio, neque ob perturbationem distrabitur, sed singularis sensitivaque quaedam."

¹⁸ Faber 1505, in *Eth.* VII, 3, n.p.: "Questio: cum omnis incontinens in perturbatione fit ignorans, quo pacto igitur illa ignoratio solvitur fitque iterum sciens. Responsio. Eadem est ratio ut dormiente et ebrio, neque ratio propria peculiarisque huius perturbationis habetur, sed quaedam communis, quae quidem ratio a naturalibus requirenda est."

¹⁹ Faber Stapulensis, *Artificialis introductio in X libros Ethicam, elucidata commentariis Clichtovaei*, Paris 1514, 36v.

²⁰ Faber/Clichtove 1514, 37r: "Debiles autem et infirmi sunt incontinentes qui deliberatione prehabita ob perturbationem non persistunt tandem victi. Et assimilantur eis qui in principio quidem hosti acriter resistunt, cui tandem defectis viribus succumbunt. Qualis fingitur Medea apud Ovidium primo consultans an deserto

Loeb Classical Library: Cambridge Mass.: Harvard University Press 1960.

[Reason] Come, thrust from your maiden breast these flames that you feel, if you can, unhappy girl. Ah, if I could, I should be more myself. [Passion] But some strange power holds me down against my will. Desire persuades me one way, reason another. I see the better and approve it, but I follow the worse.

This quote from Ovid appears to be an adequate illustration of what modern interpreters have labeled "clear-eyed akrasia"²¹: one sees the better course of action but nevertheless follows the worse. At the same time, however, we need to pay attention to the interesting and many-sided phenomenon of giving new examples of akrasia. An example illustrates the theory which is discussed, but at the same time a new example enriches and perhaps changes the discussion. Concerning akrasia, the scholastics were very restrictive in illustrations. Aristotle's examples were extensively discussed, in particular the cases of (1) tasting sweet things, (2) sleep and drunkenness and (3) inexperienced youngsters. But the whole medieval period seems only to have added one new example of akrasia, namely the case of fornication. This example first occurs in an anonymous Byzantine commentary to EN VII.²²

One clearly new technique of interpretation, brought about by the humanists, was the extensive use of new *exempla*, mostly taken from classical authors.²³ For several reasons, this new technique has a great significance for the understanding of akrasia. First, the very meaning of akratic action is dependant on what concrete actions we depict as akratic. A restrictive use of examples keeps the discussion coherent, whereas new examples broaden its scope. Second, through using classical examples humanists become aware that akrasia is not merely Aristotelian issue. Whereas the scholastics compared Aristotle's text only with a few biblical quotes, the humanists begin to compare *Nicomachean Ethics* with other classical sources as well. Third, new examples may even prompt the emergence of genuinely new philosophical issues relating to akrasia.

It seems to me that in the 16th century discussion on akrasia, the scholastic issues on the one hand remain important. On the other hand, however, the discussion receives new features which were not present in scholasticism. One of these features is the use of new *exempla*. I will use the case of Medea to highlight this development. Faber and Clichtove may not have been the first commentators to have employed this example, but it seems to me that their *Artificialis introductio* played a major role in the subsequent development of the paradigm of Medea's akrasia.

In one of his questions on incontinence, Clichtove returns to Medea. He considers that the weak persons are less culpable than some other incontinents, since the weak do use reason but are finally overcome by vehement passions. Thus weak persons are better than frightful and

patre et solo natali Jasonem exterum et alienigenam cuius vehementi amore capta fuit sequi deberet, sed tandem amoris perturbatione victa succubuit appetitui. Alternantque vices in sua consultationes nunc ratio, nunc appetitus sensitivus hoc modo:

Ra. Excute virgineo conceptas pectores lammas,
Si potest infelix, si possem sanior essem.

Ap. Sed trahit invitam nova vis, aliudque cupido
Mens aliud suadet. Video meliora, proboque,
Deteriora sequor" [the poem continues]

²¹ E.g. William Charlton, *Weakness of Will*, Oxford: Blackwell 1988.

²² So Saarinen 1994, 91. - Even this example may be to an extent Aristotelian, see EN 1134a19-22.

²³ See e.g. Lines 2002, 7, 212-214.

soft characters who do not take reason seriously in the first place. According to Ovid, Medea tried to resist her anger but her reason was finally unable to do that.²⁴ This question again illustrates the issue that Medea's akrasia was the standard mode of incontinence, since it presupposes the use of reason. The other modes of incontinence are similar to Aristotle's softness, intemperance and moral vice which do not pose the immediate philosophical problem of acting against one's own better judgment.

Medea's akrasia became a popular example of akrasia in the Protestant textbooks on Aristotle's *Ethics*. Reasons for that popularity still remain to be explored. It is nevertheless plausible to say that since the Lutheran Reformers thought that the sinful human being has some knowledge of the good but cannot pursue this knowledge, Ovid's portrayal of Medea's clear-eyed akrasia had an obvious appeal to the Reformers. Thus Philipp Melanchthon can say in his *Liber de anima* (1553) that "the will and the heart rush into foul sins, even against the judgment of the knowing power, as Medea says: I see the better things and I approve, but I follow the worse."²⁵

Luther and Melanchthon did not comment the seventh book of *Nicomachen Ethics*. Among the first generation of Lutheran academics, the most prominent commentary was written by Joachim Camerarius. His extensive *Explicatio librorum Ethicorum ad Nicomachum* (1st printing 1570) is humanistic and philological in its outlook. Camerarius discusses extensively Aristotle's Greek concepts. When he does not employ the Greek words akrasia, he uses as its Latin equivalent the phrase *impotentia animi*. Camerarius compares various editions and translations and takes an enormous amount of examples from classical texts.

Camerarius mentions what he calls "Medea's confession"²⁶ already in the beginning of his commentary to EN VII,2. He returns to Medea in the exposition of the crucial passages (EN 1146b30-1147a23) in which Aristotle explains in what sense the akratic person knows that he is doing wrong.²⁷ Medea knew that fatherland and parents were dear to her. Her love for Jason did not extinguish this knowledge, but because she wanted to keep Jason, this knowledge was inefficient and was not obeyed. Likewise, when she decided that her children should be killed, she was conscious of her crime, as Euripides tells us. But her consciousness was overcome by her anger.²⁸

²⁴ Faber/Clichtove 1514, 37r: "Tertia. Qui incontinentium sunt deteriores. Responsio: Temerarii et molles. ... Nam temerarii ob consultationis defectum vincuntur, qui si curassent consultationem ut oportuit facere vicissent concupiscentiam. Debiles autem et infirmi consultant quemadmodum. Ovidius de Medea dicit: Concipit interea validos Oetias ignes, et luctata diu postquam ratione furorem vincere non poterat, frustra Medea repugnans. Molles vero a levibus voluptatibus et tristitiis superantur. Sed debiles et delicatitia vehementibus."

²⁵ Melanchthon, *Liber de anima*, in his: *Werke, Studienausgabe, Bd. 3*, 330,20-22.

²⁶ Joachim Camerarius, *Ethicorum Aristotelis Nicomachiorum Explicatio Accuratissima*, Frankfurt 1578, 317.

²⁷ Camerarius 1578, 326.

²⁸ Camerarius 1578, 326: "Verum est, patriam et parentes omnibus esse debere carissimos. Sed Medea capitur externi amore. Haec cupiditas non illa quidem extinguit veritatem scientiae de patriae caritate et parentum amore, sed non sinit quasi elucere neque esse efficacem, et voluntatem ad Iasonem conservandum impellit. In eadem non est extincta neque deleta cogitatio sceleris, cum decrevisset interficere liberos suos, et ipsa apud Euripidem ait ... [it follows a Greek quote from Euripides, *Medea* 1078-1079]"

Generally speaking, the case is as follows: one is aware of that this bad desire should be avoided. But the desire draws you and concentrates on the particular fact or minor premise, telling that this should be pursued. Thus, the general knowledge concerning badness is not allowed to be heard or followed.²⁹ In an interesting manner, this generalization follows the traditional interpretation of Aquinas, Acciaiuolus and Faber. The akratic person is not properly aware of the minor premise, informing about the perceptual facts, and thus he, or in this case she, can sin, although she knows the general maxim that shameful deeds ought to be avoided. In a certain sense this matches Aristotle's views that "this is the condition of men under the influence of passions" and "that incontinent people must be said in a similar condition to these" (EN 1147a14-18).

On the other hand, however, the example of Medea causes the akratic person to act in a way that is more "clear-eyed" or straightforward than in Aristotle's examples.. The person realizes that she is doing wrong, but this realization is overcome by the desires. The knowledge of the good is not effective, but the will follows the bad desire. It seems that the example of Medea is accompanied with a theological, that is, Pauline or Lutheran, anthropology which can affirm that knowledge remains weaker than sinful affections. Although Camerarius gives a quasi-Aristotelian solution, namely that the minor premise is not sufficiently grasped, the non-Aristotelian example of Medea gives his interpretation a new twist.

In the second and third generation of Lutheranism, *Nicomachean Ethics* continued to be used as a basic textbook and several commentaries emerged. The *Epitome doctrinae moralis* by Theophilus Golius (1592, printed 1615) discusses akrasia in an introductory fashion. He devotes most of his attention to the basic question of Aristotle, namely whether the incontinent person knows that he is acting wrong.³⁰ In explaining and answering this question, he employs the example of Medea in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. Contrary to the claim of Socrates in EN VII, Medea's example witnesses to the common experience of people that they knowingly act wrong.³¹

Golius's answer to the question does not appear to be very coherent. On the one hand, he claims, like Aristotle, that the akratic person is ignorant at the very moment of his akratic action and that he behaves like a drunk or a sleeper.³² On the other hand, he says in a non-Aristotelian manner that Socrates is wrong in saying that nobody sins against knowledge. For it is only theoretical knowledge that cannot be consciously violated, whereas practical

²⁹ Camerarius 1578, 326: "Estque argumentatio talis: Voluptas ista mala est. Malum est vitandum. Cavendum igitur ne capiamur illa voluptate. Sed cupiditas alio rapit, et orditur ab eo quod ultimum est atque sub sensus cadit: Hoc suave et iucundum est. Ergo fruar suavitate praesente. Neque illa quae scientiae veritas de turpitudine et damno argumentatur, admittet vel audiendo vel sequendo. Similiter de aliis quae contra veram scientiam et rectam rationem committuntur, explicari res potest."

³⁰ Golius, *Epitome doctrinae moralis*, Strasbourg, n.y. (1615), 256: "Utrum incontinens sciens agat ea, quae sunt mala? vel, utrum incontinens aliter agat, quam scit esse agendum?"

³¹ Golius, op.cit., 258: "Socrates quidem videtur statuere, neminem posse contra scientiam suam aliquid agere: propterea quod scientia sit adeo firmus habitus, ut non possit facile a cupiditatibus, aut aliis affectibus vinci. Sed tamen ipsa experientia testatur: multos homines interdum aliter agere, quam sciunt esse agendum. Imo illud ipsum quoque fateri, quemadmodum Medea apud Ovid, lib. 7 conqueritur: video, inquit, meliora, proboque, deteriora sequor."

³² Golius, op.cit., 264.

knowledge related to actions can be overcome.³³ Golius claims that the soul of the akratic person is torn between reason and appetite and that he is thus to an extent (partim) knows and wills, to an extent not.³⁴ Interestingly, Golius employs Adam and Eve as example: in paradise they made a choice between two syllogisms, one recommending obedience to God, the other encouraging them to become like God. Since their appetite was led towards the second syllogism, they to an extent forgot the first one and sinned. This sin was nevertheless done knowingly and willingly.³⁵

Although Golius's exposition remains somewhat incoherent, one can see that he wants to affirm the view of sinning knowingly and willingly as far as possible. In fact, his exposition becomes rather non-Aristotelian. Since the good end remains a merely theoretical object of knowledge, knowledge can in practice be overcome by passions. In the case of Adam and Eve the appetite, or Satan, introduces its own syllogisms which are for the weak persons at least as persuasive as the right syllogism. The example of Medea's akrasia is intended to emphasize this; thus a non-Aristotelian example supports Golius's non-Aristotelian interpretation. The introduction of Adam and Eve in fact makes akrasia a normal instance of sinning. It is not the abnormal case presented in Aristotle's EN VII, demanding philosophical explanation, but akrasia now becomes the paradigm of first sin.

Given that this kind of clear-eyed akrasia is affirmed, one might think that the Aristotelian distinction between akratic and intemperate persons would be redefined. For Aristotle, intemperance was the normal vice, whereas akrasia was the abnormal exception. If humans since Adam and Eve were akratic, one would expect akrasia to become the standard mode of sinful behavior. In reality, however, this does not happen, at least not immediately. The commentators want to keep the Aristotelian distinction between incontinence and intemperance. Thus in Hubert van Giffen's *Commentary on Ethics* (printed 1608), Medea exemplifies akrasia, whereas 1. Cor 15:32 is an illustration of intemperance. Whereas the akratic person only sins reluctantly, the intemperate man rejoices of his own sin.³⁶ For van Giffen, akrasia is less voluntary than for Golius. On the other hand, like Golius, van Giffen emphasizes the partial nature of incontinent behaviour: the akratic person is torn between the partial aspects of existence.³⁷

³³ Golius, op.cit, 265-266.

³⁴ Golius, op.cit., 262-263.

³⁵ Golius, op.cit., 263: "Manifestum huius rei [partim sciens - partim ignorans] exemplum conspicitur in peccato promorum parentum: in quorum animis duo contrarii syllogismi concurrebant. Nam recta rationis talis erat syllogismus. Mandato Dei parere, est pium et honestum. Sed abstinere a fructibus arboris vetitae, est mandatum Dei. Ergo ab his fructibus est abstinendum. Contra vero, appetitus, sive Satan sic argumentabatur: Deo similem fieri, est pulchrum et iucundum. Sed si de arbore scientiae boni et mali comederitis, efficiemini Deo similes. Ergo debetis istud facere. Utrumque syllogismum probe tenebant primi parentes Adam et Eva: sed quia appetitus suo magis auscultabant, quam mandato Dei, ideo quasi obliti prioris syllogismi, arripuerunt conclusionem alterius syllogismi, et sic inducti sunt scientes et volentes ad peccandum."

³⁶ Hubertus van Giffen, *Commentarii in X libros Ethicorum*, Frankfurt 1608, 591: "... in impotente ratio vincatur a perturbationibus, in intemperante ne repugnet quidem: in illo ratio cupiditates sequatur, sed contradicens, in hoc adiuvans et consentiens; ille doleat, hic gaudeat peccatis; invitus quidem ille, hic volens. Sic et in dictis, intemperans quidem ait: Ede, bibe, lude, cras enim moriemur. At impotens: Video meliora, proboque, deteriora sequor."

³⁷ See the previous footnote and *idem*: "Impotentia vero est et illa partim absolute,

According to Lutheran theology, the human person does not possess free will but is drawn to his or her actions heteronomously. This theological idea probably makes it possible to say that the akratic person is, in terms of Medea's akrasia, aware of what is happening, but nevertheless acts reluctantly. Medea's akrasia, as it is presented in the early Lutheran textbooks of ethics, thus seems to presuppose a non-Aristotelian mindset in which one can be fully aware of the situation while sinning reluctantly. Johannes Avenarius, an early 17th century writer in Wittenberg, tries to reconcile Aristotle with Medea's akrasia. "Seeing the better" alternative, as Medea says, only means that kind of seeing which Aristotle (EN 1146b 30-35) calls having the knowledge without using it. Aristotle does not mean that the akratic person is ignorant of what is good or what is his duty, but because of being perturbed he is deceived and cannot stick to the right reason.³⁸

Avenarius presents an interpretation according to which the akratic person knows better before and after his action, but ignores something at the very moment of action. Thus Adam in paradise knew that he should not eat the apple both before and after actually eating it. At the moment of eating, however, God's commandment was forgotten.³⁹ A similar explanation is found in Golius.⁴⁰ In this case the example of Medea has not completely changed the Aristotelian, or scholastic, paradigm of transitory forgetting. But as we saw in the case of Golius, the non-Aristotelian example makes the explanation of akrasia incoherent. In Avenarius, this can be seen in his explanation that the akratic person does not ignore his duty, but in the actual situation she remains helpless (*actu destituitur*) This description of non-actual knowledge is strongly connected with the lack of power to follow the good alternative. It is thus rather a Pauline or Lutheran description of sin than an explanation of Aristotle's distinction between actual and habitual knowledge.

A similar explanation, and a similar incoherence, is found in the *Synopseos Ethicae libri duo* (1626) by Jakob Martini, another teacher in Wittenberg. According to him, the akratic person knows only habitually, not actually. He knows what is honest, but because of strong emotions that furiously incite him towards a dishonest deed, the akratic person becomes oblivious and acts against this habitual knowledge. This is meant by the reference to Medea in Ovid, Martini concludes.⁴¹ We see again that Medea's furious temptation and Aristotle's

partim cum adiunctione, et hoc quidem bifariam. Nam impotentia partim est humana, partim beluina, partim denique morbosa." - Although van Giffen later converted to Catholicism, his ethics textbook stems from lectures delivered in Protestant universities.

³⁸ Avenarius, *Quaestiones ad seriem X librorum Ethicae*, Wittenberg 1623, 239, lib. VII q11: "Num incontinens sciens mala agat?... vocabulum scientia in sano sensu accipiendum est, quod vel habitum vel actum denotat. Habitu quidem incontinens praeditus est: non enim ignorat quid bonum quidve malum sit, quid agendum quidve omittendum, sed actu destituitur, quia perturbationum impetu, et cupiditatum procellis jactatus, in portu verae rationis consistere non valet. Sed cum videt meliora, deteriora tamen sequitur, iuxta illum Medae apud Ovid. 7. Metamorph. Video meliora, proboque, deteriora sequor."

³⁹ Avenarius 1623, 240: "V.G. Adamus ante esum pomi habebat scientiam mandati divini de non comedentis fructibus arboris scientiae boni et mali. In ipso autem esu pomi obliviscebatur hujus mandati. Post esum revocavit sibi in mentem praeceptum divinum, ideoque poenitudinem ductus, conabatur se a conspectu Dei subducere."

⁴⁰ Golius, op.cit., 264.

⁴¹ Jakob Martini, *Synopseos Ethicae libri duo*, Wittenberg 1626, 473-474: "Eadem plane ratione incontinens dicitur habere scientiam juxta primam sciendi modum. Scit enim, quae sunt honesta et turpia, sed iuxta secundum sciendi modum non habet

forgetting or ignorance fit together only with some difficulty.

My last example concerns a book that was published in Jena 1628 and remains until today one of the greatest *Summae* of early Lutheran ethics. It is the *Philosophiae moralis systema* by Wolfgang Heider, professor of ethics and politics in Jena and the rector of the university in 1591 and 1607. This 1000-page work contains a detailed discussion on Aristotle's akrasia.

Among the six questions that Heider asks about continence, the most extensive is Aristotle's classical problem: does the akratic person, whose mind is confused by the passion, know that he is doing wrong?⁴² Heider first describes the Socratic position in EN VII. If nobody sins against better knowledge, there is no incontinence, but both akrasia and enkrateia can be reduced to intemperance and temperance.⁴³ Contrary to Socrates, for Aristotle experience shows that most people do things they know to be wrong. Heider emphasizes this counter-argument by presenting several examples, among others the case of Medea and the statement of Apostle Paul in Romans 7:15: "What I want to do, I do not do, but what I hate to do." He even adds that it would be stupid to argue against this proof from experience.⁴⁴

After this, one almost expects that Heider would turn Aristotle into a good Lutheran by saying that clear-eyed akrasia is obvious. However, Heider qualifies his discussion through introducing Aristotle's traditional distinctions: The akratic person knows his sin before and after his shameful action, but not necessarily during that action. He may know but not use his knowledge, or he may know the major premise of the practical syllogism, but not the minor premise.⁴⁵ Because of these distinctions one must therefore conclude that akratic persons resemble those who are drunk or asleep. Although their mind is clear before and after the akratic action, for a certain period during that bad action they resemble ignorant people.⁴⁶ Because of this, we may grant that Socrates is partially right in saying that nobody can against true knowledge, given that this knowledge pertains to the universal truth. But the knowledge achieved through the perception of particulars can easily be removed by the passions.⁴⁷

scientiam, quia ista non utitur in agendo, neque eam considerat, sed propter ingentem animi perturbationem et vehementiam affectuum scientiae quodammodo obliviscitur, dum furenter ad scelus aliquod designandum rapitur, et ita contra illam agit. Unde locum habet illud Medeae apud Ovidium: video meliora, proboque, deteriora sequitur. Quocirca sciens actu non peccat, sciens autem habitu, dum eo non utitur, peccare potest."

⁴² Wolfgang Heider, *Philosophiae moralis systema*, Jena 1628, 817, q3: "An incontinens sciens agat ea, quae mala, animi quaedam perturbatione incitatus."

⁴³ Heider 1628, 821-822.

⁴⁴ Heider 1628, 822: "Aristoteles vero incontinentem scienter agere per ipsam demonstrat experientiam, quae testatur, maximam hominum partem ea facere, quae sciunt, esse mala et rationis appetitusque luctam sentire gravissimam. Vid. 7. Metam. de Medea ... At vero stultum est, rationes contra experientiam velle quaerere. His sacrae literae quoque a stipulantur. Rom 7. Non quod volo, bonum, id facio, sed, quod nolo, malum, id ago."

⁴⁵ Heider 1628, 823-824.

⁴⁶ Heider 1628, 824: "... Quo pacto autem ignorantia depulsa scientiam recuperet incontinentens, id eadem fit ratione, qua ebrii et dormientes. In ipso facto, cui tamen non punctum aut momentum satis est, sed justum temporis spacium, ignorantia similis est incontinentens, adeo perturbationibus vitiosis et violentis recta ratio opprimitur."

⁴⁷ Heider 1628, 825: "Denique ad Socratis opinionem hoc responsi dat Aristoteles: Scientia vera et proprie dicta, si praesto sit, a perturbatione vinci non potest, et hoc sensu verum est illud Socratis, qui neminem contra scientiam suam peccare posse

In this way Heider attempts to preserve Aristotle's argument. Given the evidence of Medea's and apostle Paul's clear-eyed akrasia, he is not ready to say that the akratic person is really ignorant, but that he "resembles ignorant" (*ignoranti similis*). We may also say that Heider does not identify Aristotle's position as his own, but he only exposes Aristotle's view. This observation is strengthened by the last paragraph of the question, titled as "Where does incontinence come from?"⁴⁸ Heider stresses that Aristotle was interested in the natural causes of action, in this case of the conflict between reason and appetitive powers. In the light of natural reasoning, we ought to say that the akratic person sins both knowingly and because of ignorance.⁴⁹

In addition to vehement passions, natural causes of akrasia may include the temperaments, various illnesses and defects of mind and body. But, Heider adds, if you want to find out where the conflict between reason and appetitive powers finally stems from, philosophy cannot help you. The ultimate answer is found from the Holy Scripture which teaches that this conflict and disorder, as all other modes of badness and vanity, is a consequence of the sin. Thus the final answer to the problem of akrasia is only found in theology.⁵⁰

Is it possible to draw any general conclusions on the basis of these early modern interpretations of akrasia? I have proceeded from the observation that when the texts treat Aristotle's problem of acting against better knowledge, they often give the non-Aristotelian example of Medea's akrasia. This observation first witnesses to the humanistic habit of illustrating the issue at hand through various classical *exempla*. Second, I have claimed that this particular example argues in favor of finally non-Aristotelian view of clear-eyed akrasia. Third, I think that Medea's akrasia is employed by Lutheran expositors⁵¹ since it goes well together with the Reformation idea that we know of our sin but cannot do good works.

I have further argued that Medea's akrasia and Reformation theology together give rise to some tensions in the ethical textbooks. This tension may be systematized as follows: a strictly Socratic position considers akrasia to be *impossible*. Aristotle attempts to make a distinction between akrasia and intemperance. In Aristotle's view, akrasia is possible but *abnormal*

dicebat. Scientia aisthêtikê a cupiditatibus facile labefactatur et convellitur."

⁴⁸ Heider 1628, 825: "Unde incontinentia?"

⁴⁹ Heider 1628, 825: "Aristoteles ibidem incontinentiam naturalem causam esse ait, dissidium rationis et appetitus. ... Et ita quidem sciens peccat incontinens et ignorans, quod qua ratione sit accipiendum, iam ante diximus."

⁵⁰ Heider 1628, 825-826: "Ad hanc naturalem, quam vocat Aristoteles, causam, accedunt et aliae quaedam, ut temperamenta corporum, morbi, res adversae et secundae, vis et coactio, nec non illa omnia, quae rationem debilitant, acuunt cupiditates, exasperant perturbationes. At vero, si quaeratur, unde sit illud rationis et appetitus dissidium, omnis Philosophia conticescit. Sacrae vero literae docent, quod hanc ataksian et alia malorum genera, et totam hanc vanitatem, cui natura subiecta, non aliunde quam a peccato originem trahere, qua de re Theologi plura."

⁵¹ A Catholic point of comparison is offered by Piccolomini 1594. He discusses the problem "An sciens peccat" [homo, incontinens] and related issues on pp. 256-268, with a focus on comparison between Aristotle and Plato. Although in theology we say that people sin willingly (267), in moral philosophy we only say that people act against knowledge when they are in some sense confused or perturbed (257-259). Medea is not mentioned, but Piccolomini says that in this qualified sense a claim can be made that "...in septimo moralium Nicomachorum, cap 2. & 3., patefacit, incontinentem videre meliora, sequi autem deteriora" (258). - See above footnote 4.

behaviour, whereas intemperance is just an ordinary vice. For Lutherans, however, knowing the good and sinning is nothing else than a *normal* way of acting wrongly, the way how already Adam and Eve sinned. Consequently, arguing that akrasia is possible or showing that it is less bad than intemperance were for the Lutherans not among the most interesting philosophical challenges. For them, akrasia could be explained in terms of Medea's behaviour as a situation in which reason is overcome by the passions. Many early modern Lutheran expositors will nevertheless remain loyal to Aristotle's views, and this is why the tensions arise. Commentators tend to admit that in some way there is ignorance involved in the akratic action, as Aristotle claims. On the other hand, however, they insert the non-Aristotelian example of Medea's akrasia in order to show that the real problem is not ignorance, but the vehement and sinful passions.

In contemporary classical scholarship, Christopher Gill has attempted to outline a Stoic conception of akrasia. According to Gill, the inner conflict of mind, as discussed by the Stoics, can be regarded as a continuation of Aristotle's discussion of akrasia. Like the 16th century commentators of Aristotle, Gill considers Medea's inner conflict as a paradigm of this variety of akrasia.⁵² See also J.M. Dillon, *Medea among the Philosophers*, in: J.J. Clauss & S.I. Johnston (eds.), *Medea*, Princeton: Princeton University Press 1997, 211-218; Gerd Theissen, *Psychologische Aspekte paulinischer Theologie*, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck 1983, 214-220; H. Hommel, *Das 7. Kapitel des Römerbriefs im Lichte antiker Überlieferung*, in his *Sebasmata*, Tübingen: Mohr 1984, 141-173, (here: 159-163). These studies also inform of the contemporary relevance of Medea and Stoicism in biblical studies. I am grateful to Mikko Yrjönsuuri and Niko Huttunen for drawing my attention to this literature. Without going deeper to Gill's observations, we may say that the early modern humanists on their part became aware that there exists a post-Aristotelian classical discussion which concerns acting against reason. Like Gill, they portrayed Medea as an example of Hellenistic akrasia.

On the other hand, the 16th century commentators did not intend to be Stoics. At least since Melancthon, Lutherans remained critical of Stoicism.⁵³ In the commentaries quoted above, no explicit affirmation of Stoicism can be found. The example of Medea does not aim at inserting a Stoic view, but it is rather connected with the early modern Protestant doctrine of sin. For this reason, Medea's akrasia is in our sources not an example of Stoic akrasia. It is nevertheless interesting that the example of Medea inserts a non-Aristotelian paradigm into the discussion. Since this example is so common in early Lutheran commentaries, we may perhaps label it as a Lutheran paradigm of akrasia.

3. Martin Luther

In spite of the massive amount of Luther research, it is still possible that new insights to Luther's ethics can be gained by future studies. The reason for this is above all that we do not

⁵² Among his various contributions I only mention Christopher Gill, *Passion as Madness in Roman Poetry*, in: *The Passions in Roman Thought and Literature*, ed. S.M. Braund and C. Gill, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1997, 213-241. Gill considers the case of Medea in Euripides (220,227), Seneca (passim), Ovid (221), Chrysipp (225,227) and Galen (225). According to Gill (225), "we know from Galen that the issue of how to analyse (apparent) self-division and akrasia was a subject of intense debate in Stoicism."

⁵³ E.g. in his *Ethicae doctrinae elementa* (1550), in: *Opera omnia, Corpus reformationum* 16, pp. 179, 193, Melancthon criticizes Stoics.

know yet the academic tradition of ethics at the University of Erfurt in sufficient detail.⁵⁴ Luther began his academic career in Wittenberg by teaching a course in Nicomachean Ethics in 1508, but his lecture notes have not survived.⁵⁵

For two reasons, however, I think that we can be rather brief in treating Luther's contribution to the discussion on akrasia. 1. Luther's criticism of Aristotle's ethics was a massive and wholesale attempt to disregard all philosophical teaching on human action. Luther did not pay attention to particular issues of Aristotle's action theory. 2. Luther never speaks of incontinence or akrasia in Aristotle's terms. The Latin word "incontinentia" appears very rarely in Luther's writings, and when it does, its meaning is determined by Sap. Sal 8:21 and 1. Cor 7:5.⁵⁶ Following the Augustinian tradition, Luther interprets the incontinence mentioned in these verses as sexual transgression to which the sinner consents.⁵⁷ In my view, the only place in which some influence of Aristotelian akrasia may be assumed, appears in *Rationis Latominiae confutatio* (1521). There Luther holds that 1. Cor 7:5 does not speak of weakness, but of standard sexual vice to which the sinner consents. It may perhaps be assumed that Luther here ascribes a quasi-Aristotelian view of *incontinentia* to Latomus, but only in order to criticize it.⁵⁸ If this is the case, it only underlines the issue that Luther himself assumes an Augustinian view of continence and incontinence.

We may nevertheless briefly elucidate the first point, namely that the young Luther's wholesale criticism of Aristotle's ethics amounts to an action theory in which akrasia becomes irrelevant. In his *Disputatio contra scholasticam theologiam* (1517) Luther presents a number of anti-Aristotelian theses in which the whole theory of human action is criticized. According to Luther, the will cannot by nature conform to the right reason but necessarily follows sin. It is not in the power of will either to will or to nill something shown to it. For Luther, ignorance does not excuse of sin. He even denies the Aristotelian axiom that we are masters of our own actions. Luther says that the whole Aristotelian ethics is an enemy of grace and that Luther's own view goes against all scholastic theologians.⁵⁹ 43. Tota fere Aristotelis

⁵⁴ Theodor Dieter, *Der junge Luther und Aristoteles*, Berlin: de Gruyter 2001, collects more or less all that we know and pays already some attention to the Erfurt "Buridanism". For possible forthcoming studies, see footnote 2 above.

⁵⁵ This well-known fact is found e.g. in Bernhard Lohse, *Martin Luther*, Hamburg: Beck 1981, 39.

⁵⁶ Sap. Sal 8:21: "... scivi quoniam aliter non possem esse continens, nisi Deus det"; 1. Cor 7:5: "... ne tentet vos Satanas propter incontinentiam vestram."

⁵⁷ For the Augustinian and Ciceronian interpretation of continencia/incontinentia, cf. Saarinen 1994, 43. The word incontinentia and its derivatives appear only about 20 times in Luther's collected works, the so-called *Weimarer Ausgabe* (WA). See Sachregister to WA, s.v. incontinentia. - In this and the following I have used the internet edition of WA (www.luther.chadwyck.co.uk) and its effective search functions.

⁵⁸ Luther, WA 8,95,9-17: "Latomus ac ratione reddita probabit, quod incontinentia illa [1. Cor. 7:5] non sit incontinentia, sed infirmitas et poena. Et quando Satanas eos tentat, non ad incontinentiam, sed ad infirmitatem tentat, quod si quo case consenserint incontinentiae, sed ad infirmitatem tentat, quod si quo casu consenserint incontinentiae, non peccato consenserint, sed infirmitati et poenae, ac per hoc dum peccant, etiam non peccabunt.. ... Et nova Theologia in mundum veniet, quod peccatum sit non consentire peccato, sed infirmitati et poenae."

⁵⁹ Luther, *Contra scholasticam theologiam*, in: Studienausgabe 1,166,3-169,2: "6. Falsitas est, quod voluntas possit se conformare dictamini recto naturaliter. Contra

ethica, pessima et gratiae inimica. Contra Scholasticos."

Given this frontal attack, it makes no sense to speak of akrasia as a particular problem. Weakness of the will can only be a philosophical problem if we adopt most of Aristotle's view of human action as a process in which the right reason normally guides the choice of the will. If we claim that we are not masters of our own acts in the first place and that the will "necessarily" chooses to sin, the problem of akrasia simply does not emerge. Consenting to sin while knowing the better alternative may for the young Luther be the standard situation of human beings, but this is not an akratic situation in the Aristotelian sense. It is rather the consequence of the fundamental rupture of the connection between reason and will.

On the other hand, it may be reasonable to assume that this kind of frontal attack does not make Aristotle and his discussion on akrasia to disappear for ever. Luther's attack to philosophy highlights some anti-Pelagian features of his own theology, but it does not serve as a constructive theory of human action. Luther scholars have often pointed out that the mature Luther is more moderate. He affirms a certain guiding capacity of human reason in dealing with earthly and natural matters, for instance in household and politics.⁶⁰ Given this moderation it is understandable that, although Luther did not return to discuss Aristotle's akrasia, many later Lutheran teachers of ethics did so. At the same time, there remained a Lutheran tension which was not only due to the conflict between reason and appetite. The tension was, as we have seen, fundamentally caused by the Lutheran claim that human reason cannot grasp the root causes of sin. For this reason, the akratic conflict could not be adequately explained by merely referring to natural causes.

Although Luther cannot be counted among the interpreters of Aristotle's akrasia, his mature *Lectures on Genesis* (1535-1545) contains one remarkable passage. This passage witnesses of Luther's awareness of some details of the interpretation history sketched in the present paper. The passage is remarkable for two reasons: first, because Luther mentions Medea's akrasia, and second, since he gives what I would call one of the most original examples of akrasia. The passage reads as follows:

This is what happens to the ungodly: though they know that they are sinning and that punishment of sin is imminent, they smugly overcome their fear when their wickedness gains the upper hand. Thus in the passage before us [Gen. 11:4] the words reveal a conscience that is troubled and yet smugly keeps on disregarding the punishment. Such a conscience is attributed to Medea by Ovid when she says: "I see and applaud the better things, but I follow the worse." And we ourselves once heard Karlstadt say at this very place [Wittenberg lecture room], when he was conferring a doctor's degree, that he knew that it was a sin to create doctors of theology, but that he was doing it nevertheless. It is no trivial sin to harden oneself against conscience and

Scotum, Gabrielem.

7. Sed necessario elicit actum difforem et malum sine gratia dei.

10. Conceditur quod voluntas non est libera ad tenendum in quodlibet secundum rationem boni sibi ostensum. Contra Scotum, Gabrielem.

11. Nec est in potestate eius velle et nolle quodlibet ostensu.

36. Breviter. Nec rectum dictamen habet natura nec bonam voluntatem.

37. Non est verum quod ignorantia invincibilis a toto excusat. Contra omnes scholasticos.

41. Non sumus domini actuum nostrorum a principio usque ad finem. Sed servi. Contra philosophos.

⁶⁰ Bernhard Lohse, *Luthers Theologie*, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck 1995, 214-223 summarizes the scholarly discussion.

to glory in a sin willingly and knowingly.⁶¹

Luther here continues the interpretation history of Medea's akrasia. He holds that people like Medea sin knowingly and willingly. At the same time, they are overcome by strong perturbations. It is thus a sort of clear-eyed akrasia that is described here. And yet, on the other hand, this exceptional passage is not intended to be a further comment on the scholastic or early modern interpretation history of akrasia. It rather serves as an illustration of the Pauline, Augustinian and Lutheran theological view that human beings sin knowingly and willingly. This is a standard mode of sinning and thus nothing exceptional. Lutheran philosophers like Wolfgang Heider may grant that the phenomenon of acting against better knowledge is hard to explain in the light of natural reason. But for theologians like Luther the explanation is obvious: it is sin that draws human persons against their knowledge and will. For theologians, Medea's akrasia simply serves as an illustration of sin; it does not pose any deeper theoretical problems.

⁶¹ Luther, WA 42,416,36-417,5: "Sic enim impiis accidit, etsi sciunt, se peccare et impendere peccati poenas, tamen securi perumpunt, superante malicia, timorem. Ita hoc in loco ostendunt verba perturbatam conscientiam, et tamen secure pergentem et contemnentem poenas, qualis Medeae apud Ovidium fingitur, cum dicit, Video meliora proboque, deteriora sequor. Et nos hic aliquando audivimus Carolostadium, cum Doctores promoveret, dicentem, se scire, quod Doctores Theologiae creare esset peccatum, et tamen facere. Hoc non leve peccatum est, indurari contra conscientiam, et in peccato quasi gloriari volentes et scientes." - The English translation is from Luther's *Works, American Edition*, vol. 2, 219-220.