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SOCIÉTÉ INTERNATIONALE POUR L'ÉTUDE DE LA PHILOSOPHIE MÉDIÉVALE  
(S.I.E.P.M.)

Universalità della Ragione. Pluralità delle Filosofie nel Medioevo  
Universalité de la Raison. Pluralité des Philosophies au Moyen Âge  
Universality of Reason. Plurality of Philosophies in the Middle Ages

*XII Congresso Internazionale di Filosofia Medievale*  
Palermo, 17-22 settembre 2007

VOLUME II.2  
COMUNICAZIONI  
*LATINA*

a cura di  
Alessandro MUSCO  
e di Carla COMPAGNO - Salvatore D'AGOSTINO - Giuliana MUSOTTO  
*Indici* di Giuliana MUSOTTO



2012

Carla COMPAGNO ha curato l'editing dei testi della sezione *Lulliana*; Salvatore D'AGOSTINO ha curato l'editing della sezione *Latina* del vol. II.2; Giuliana MUSOTTO ha curato l'uniformità redazionale dell'intero volume e gli *Indici*; Alessandro MUSCO ha curato la supervisione dell'editing redazionale del volume ed il coordinamento scientifico-editoriale.

Société Internationale pour l'Étude de la Philosophie Médiévale (S.I.E.P.M)  
Universalità della Ragione. Pluralità delle Filosofie nel Medioevo = Universalité de la Raison.  
Pluralité des Philosophies au Moyen Âge = Universality of Reason. Plurality of Philosophies in  
the Middle Ages : 12. Congresso Internazionale di Filosofia Medievale : Palermo, 17-22 settembre  
2007. – Palermo : Officina di Studi Medievali, 2012.  
ISBN 978-88-6485-025-2 (Intera Opera)

V. II.2 : Comunicazioni : Latina / a cura di Alessandro Musco ... [et al.] ; indici di Giuliana Musotto.  
(Biblioteca dell'Officina di Studi Medievali ; 14.II.2)

I. Musco, Alessandro

II. Compagno, Carla

III. D'Agostino, Salvatore

IV. Musotto, Giuliana

1. Filosofia – Medioevo – Atti – Palermo

180 CDD-21

ISBN 978-88-6485-051-1 (vol. II.2)

Cip: *Biblioteca dell'Officina di Studi Medievali*

I saggi qui pubblicati sono stati sottoposti a "Peer Review" / The essays published here have been "Peer Reviewed"

Collana diretta da:

*Armando Bisanti, Olivier Boulnois, José Martinez Gasquez, Alessandro Musco, Luca Parisoli, Salvador Rus Rufino, Christian Trottmann, Pere Villalba i Varneda.*

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Prima edizione, Palermo, luglio 2012

Stampa: FOTOGRAF – Palermo

Grafica editoriale: Alberto Musco

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## Peter Olivi on Practical Reasoning

### Introduction

The subject matter of this essay is Peter of John Olivi's (ca. 1248–98) conception of reason chiefly from the viewpoint of human action. Olivi is known among the medievalists as a fierce proponent of the freedom of the will in the face of not only emotional impulses but also intellectual considerations. He flatly rejects earlier medieval theories of the relation between the reason and the will – especially those theories which incorporate strong Aristotelian elements – and argues that the will is capable of controlling reason, moving itself and reason to action, choosing the means to an end, constituting new ends to itself, and, basically, willing whatever it wants to will. The will is the ultimate source of human action, and reason has only a subordinate role, because reason does not determine the course of action a person takes.

This much has been well covered by modern scholarship.<sup>1</sup> But less attention has been paid to Olivi's conception of reason—or, as he prefers, the intellect (*intellectus*) – and its operations.<sup>2</sup> The intellect figures, after all, prominently in the psychological process that leads to action, because it presents an object for the will: I can will only those things I am conscious of, and the intellect provides me with consciousness.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, the intellect is needed – at least sometimes<sup>4</sup> – to reason and to figure out what course of action one should

<sup>1</sup> See, e.g., B. KENT, *Aristotle and the Franciscans: Gerald Odonis' Commentary on the "Nicomachean Ethics"* (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms International 1984), pp. 184-205, 303-7; M. YRJÖNSUURI, *Free Will and Self-Control in Peter Olivi*, in *Emotions and Choice from Boethius to Descartes*, ed. H. Lagerlund-M. Yrjönsuuri (Dordrecht/Boston/London: Kluwer 2002), pp. 99-128; I would like to express my gratitude to Jessica Slattery, who revised the language of this essay.

<sup>2</sup> There are studies which deal with Olivi's conception of human reason, such as those of Séraphin Belmont, *Le mécanisme de la connaissance d'après Pierre Olivi, dit Olivi*, in «La France franciscaine» 12 (1929): pp. 291-323, 463-487; KENT, loc. cit. However, the main interest in these studies is to uncover Olivi's conception of the will, or the relation between the will and reason. They do not deal with the details of intellectual operations which lead to action.

<sup>3</sup> PETRUS IOANNIS OLIVI, *Quaestiones in secundum librum sententiarum*, ed. B. Jansen, Bibliotheca franciscana scholastica medii aevi IV–VI (Florence: Collegii S. Bonaventurae 1922-26) (hereafter *II Sent.*), q. 54, vol. II, p. 280; *Ibid.*, q. 37, vol. I, p. 659; *Ibid.*, q. 51, vol. II, p. 122; *Ibid.*, q. 58, p. 464; *Ibid.*, q. 59, p. 540; J. TOIVANEN, *Peter Olivi on Internal Senses*, in «British Journal for the History of Philosophy» 15:3 (2007), pp. 427-454.

<sup>4</sup> Choice, or volition, is not necessarily preceded by intellectual consideration. The intellect has to think something that functions as an object for an act of the will, but this “something” does not have to be reasoned out. The

take. When I think of what I should do in the particular situation I happen to be in, I may think about alternative actions, and I may ponder one action from different aspects. Olivi thinks that these intellectual operations can be depicted in the form of a so-called practical syllogism, but he does not accept the medieval Aristotelian framework of practical reasoning as such, because he opposes some central tenets of it. In this essay, I shall discuss Olivi's understanding of practical reasoning and the so-called practical syllogism, and I shall argue that he accepts the latter as a correct way of describing some of our thought processes, although he understands the role of practical syllogism in human action in a different light than Aristotle or medieval Aristotelians. He deviates from them, because he thinks that action is ultimately determined by a free choice of will and not by intellectual considerations, and also, because he conceives of the process of practical reasoning itself somewhat differently. He thinks that in many cases the process of figuring out what course of action one should take cannot be put in terms of a simple practical syllogism; rather, practical reasoning involves thinking of several options simultaneously, or one option from various aspects. It is a complex process that incorporates elements from a practical syllogism and is guided by the will.

## 1. Practical reason and practical syllogism

In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle makes a well-known distinction between theoretical and practical reason. He thinks that theoretical reason and practical reason are distinct components of the reasoning part of the soul.<sup>5</sup> Theoretical reason deals with necessary and eternal first principles, whereas practical reason is related to human action. Practical reason is concerned with things that may change, and its aim is to provide human beings with an understanding of the particular situations in which they live and of the things they should do in those situations. The operation of practical reason can be described as the so-called practical syllogism, in which a universal principle is applied to a particular situation.<sup>6</sup> As Aristotle puts it (in *EN VII.3*, 1147a25–35), if I think that “Everything sweet ought to be tasted”, and “This is sweet”, I immediately taste “this” (whatever it happens to be in that particular situation).<sup>7</sup>

idea is that in order to be able to will for something, I have to be conscious of the object of my volition, but I do not have to go through discursive reasoning: it suffices that something occurs to my mind. For instance, if I think of a cup of coffee, I may will for it without going through a reasoning process in which I figure out whether I should go for the cup of coffee. See, e.g., *II Sent.* q. 83, vol. III, pp. 180–1; *Ibid.*, q. 57, vol. II, p. 358; KENT, *Aristotle and the Franciscans*, cit., p. 187; This approach is in line with Aristotle, who does not seem to think that a practical syllogism would precede all intentional action (See, e.g., D. CHARLES, *Aristotle's Philosophy of Action* (London: Duckworth 1984), pp. 95–6).

<sup>5</sup> *EN VI.1–2*, 1139a1–1139b5; see also *EN VI.5*, 1140b 25–30.

<sup>6</sup> Aristotle discusses practical reasoning, which can be depicted in the form of practical syllogism, in several places. See, e.g., *EN VII.3*, 1147a 1–35 (esp. 25–35); *DA III.11*, 434a 17–21; *De motu animalium* 7, 701a6–701b. The term “practical syllogism” is not used by Aristotle.

<sup>7</sup> «The one opinion is universal, the other is concerned with the particular facts, and here we come to something within the sphere of perception; when a single opinion results from the two, the soul must in one type of case affirm the conclusion, while in the case of opinions concerned with production it must immediately act (e.g. if

On the face of it, Aristotle seems to think that the conclusion of the practical syllogism is not a propositional thought concerning things to be done but an action – or at least that the conclusion is at the same time an action and a propositional thought. This is, in fact, a disputed question among modern scholars, since some interpret Aristotle as saying that the conclusion of a practical syllogism is distinct from the ensuing action.<sup>8</sup> In the Middle Ages, however, his theory was generally expounded as if the conclusion were an action: if a universal premise and a particular premise are both active in the mind of the person, action follows. And if action does not follow – in the case of incontinence, for instance – there has to be something wrong in the process of reasoning.

This Aristotelian framework of the reasoning process that leads to action was influential in the latter half of the 13<sup>th</sup> century, although it was interpreted in many different ways.<sup>9</sup> However, not everybody accepted it as a correct way of accounting for human action. Franciscan authors in particular, who drew upon an Augustinian notion of will, put forth alternative theories of the relation between action and reasoning. Olivi is one of the authors who oppose many central tenets of the Aristotelian model. Olivi begins his exposition of the intellectual faculties of the soul by presenting what he takes to be Aristotle's view, namely, that theoretical and practical reason are separate powers of the soul. Olivi rejects this outright. According to him, "in our mind there are not several intellectual powers".<sup>10</sup> We have

everything sweet ought to be tasted, and this is sweet [...] the man who can act and is not restrained must at the same time actually act accordingly» (EN VII.3, 1147a 25-35; I am using the Revised Oxford Translation, ed. Barnes.); Grosseteste's translation of this passage goes as follows: «Hec quidem enim universalis opinio. Altera autem de singularibus est, quorum sensus iam proprius. Cum autem una fiat ex ipsis, necessarium conclusum ubi quidem dicere animam, in factivis autem, operari confestim; puta si omne dulce gustare oportet, hoc autem dulce ut unum aliquod singularium, necessarium potentem et non prohibitum simul, hoc operari» (*Aristoteles latinus* XXVI 1-3, fasciculus tertius, *Ethica Nicomachea. Translatio Roberti Grosseteste Lincolnensis sive "Liber Ethicorum"*. A. *Reconsilio pura*, ed. R. A. Gauthier (Leiden/Bruxelles: E. J. Brill/Desclée de Brouwer, 1972), VII.5, 47a 25-31).

<sup>8</sup> Most of the modern literature concerning Aristotle's theory of practical reasoning deals with incontinence, or weakness of the will (*akrasia*). There are two basic lines of interpretation of Aristotle's view on *akrasia*. An intellectualist reading has it that an incontinent person makes some kind of an intellectual error and does not reach the right conclusion, and due to this carries out a wrong deed. This interpretation makes it possible to take seriously those formulations by Aristotle which explicitly say that the conclusion is identical with action. By contrast, those who favour a non-intellectualist interpretation emphasize other passages by Aristotle, and they claim that even an incontinent person reaches the right conclusion but violates it for some reason. This kind of "clear-eyed" incontinence presupposes that the conclusion of a practical syllogism is not identical with action. For an intellectualist reading, see, e.g., D. BOSTOCK, *Aristotle's Ethics* (Oxford/NY: Oxford UP 2000), pp. 123-42; P. DESTRIÉE, *Aristotle on the Causes of Akrasia*, in *Akrasia in Greek Philosophy*, ed. C. Bobonich-P. Destriée, (Philosophia Antiqua 106) Brill, Leiden/Boston 2007, p. 143; The most influential non-intellectualist interpretations are CHARLES (1984) and NORMAN O. DAHL, *Practical Reason, Aristotle, and Weakness of the Will* (University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis 1984); R. SAARINEN, *Weakness of Will in Medieval Thought. From Augustine to Buridan* (E.J. Brill, Leiden/NY/Köln 1994), pp. 10–17, presents a concise analysis of the different interpretations that are important from the point of view of medieval discussions.

<sup>9</sup> For various interpretations that medieval philosophers presented, see R. SAARINEN, *Weakness of Will in Medieval Thought*. For references to more recent discussion, see R. SAARINEN, *Weakness of Will: The Plurality of Medieval Explanations*, in *Emotions and Choice from Boethius to Descartes*, ed. H. Lagerlund-M. Yrjönsuuri, *Studies in the History of Philosophy of Mind*, vol. 1, Kluwer Academic Publishers, Dordrecht/Boston/London 2002, pp. 85-97.

<sup>10</sup> «[...] in mente nostra non sunt plures potentiae intellectivae [...]» (*II Sent.* q. 55, vol. II, p. 286.); Olivi thinks that he is in juxtaposition with Aristotle, but actually it is not at all clear that Aristotle would have agreed

only one intellectual cognitive power, the scope of which includes not only eternal unchanging principles but also the particular situations we live in and the particular objects we face.<sup>11</sup> It is by one and the same power that we deliberate all the aspects of the actions we consider doing.

However, Olivi's opposition toward the Aristotelian theory – or the theory Olivi takes to be Aristotle's – goes further and comprises also the operations of practical reason proper. He discusses the so-called practical syllogism in at least two places in his question-commentary on the Sentences. In the first discussion, which appears in the question 57, Olivi presents his thesis according to which human will is absolutely free in the face of intellectual considerations. In the course of his discussion, Olivi takes up a counter-argument to his thesis. It goes as follows:

Likewise, according to Aristotle [...] when the intellect states habitually and actually that something ought not to be done universally – such as “It is wrong (*malum*) for a human being to fornicate” and the like – and it states actually and simultaneously with this the particular of this, namely, that “It is wrong for me to fornicate now”, Aristotle says that in the will there necessarily follows an evasion or rejection of this wrongdoing, in the same way as a conclusion follows necessarily from two premises that are ordered in the form of a syllogism. In the same way, if the intellect states actually (and not only habitually) in a universal and in a particular way that something ought to be done, Aristotle says that in the will there immediately and necessarily follows an act or pursuit (*prosecutio*).<sup>12</sup>

The first important aspect that deserves attention in Olivi's interpretation of Aristotle's theory is the presence of the will as an independent faculty. As is well known, medieval conceptions of the will – especially the conception Franciscan voluntarists put forth – cannot be found in Aristotle's works. Even though Aristotle may think that the conclusion of a practical syllogism is an intellectual judgement, it is clear that he does not think it should be followed by a separate act of the will in order for it to turn into an action, simply because he does not recognize the existence of such a mental faculty.<sup>13</sup> Aristotle's *prohairesis* is, as

with Olivi's paraphrasing of his theory: Aristotle himself (presumably) does not think that theoretical and practical reason should be understood as separate faculties in the sense Olivi takes him as saying (See, e.g., BOSTOCK, *Aristotle's Ethics*, cit., pp. 75-81). For Olivi's reading of Aristotle's theory, see *II Sent.* q. 55, vol. II, pp. 284-6. Olivi refers to the beginning of book 6 of *EN* and to *DA* III. See *DA* III.10 and the references in note 5.

<sup>11</sup> Olivi's conception of the possibility of direct intellectual knowledge of particular things was innovative in his time. C. BÉRUBÉ, *La connaissance de l'individuel au Moyen Age* (Montreal/Paris: Presses de l'Université de Montreal/PUF, 1964), pp. 100-6; *II Sent.* q. 67, vol. II, pp. 616-8; *Ibid.*, q. 72, vol. III, p. 37.

<sup>12</sup> «Item, secundum Aristotelem, VII *Ethicorum*, capitulo 5, quando intellectus dicit habitu et actu aliquid esse non agendum in universali, ut malum esse hominem fornicari et consimilia, et simul cum hoc dicit actu eius particularem, hanc scilicet, quod me nunc fornicari est malum: dicit quod necessario sequitur in voluntate fuga seu reprobatio illius mali, sicut ex duabus praemissis syllogistice ordinatis necessario sequitur conclusio; et eodem modo, si in universali et particulari dicat intellectus actu et non solum habitu aliquid esse agendum: dicit quod in voluntate statim necessario sequetur actio seu prosecutio» (*II Sent.* q. 57, vol. II, pp. 309-10.); The reference is to book VII, chapter 3: in Grosseteste's translation of *EN* the division of chapters differs from the modern editions. Olivi probably uses this translation, because it was immensely popular at the time (B. G. DODD, *Aristoteles latinus*, in *The Cambridge History of Later Medieval Philosophy*, ed. Kretzmann, Kenny, Pinborg (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1982.), p. 52).

<sup>13</sup> BOSTOCK, *Aristotle's Ethics*, cit., p. 123.

Bonnie Kent puts it, “a desire related to thought or thought related to desire”.<sup>14</sup> It is not a choice in the medieval sense of the word, and in this respect the conclusion does not have to be chosen before it turns into action; even less is it directly an act of the will, as Olivi seems to say in the passage above (more of this below). Olivi clearly approaches the issue from a medieval perspective, with a strong voluntaristic emphasis, and he does not seem to realize that he is imposing an anachronistic reading to Aristotle’s text when he adds an additional element, the will, to the process of turning practical reasoning into action. In this way, Olivi’s interpretation of Aristotle’s idea deviates from the one Aristotle in fact puts forth. It comes much closer to medieval Aristotelian theories that are influenced by an Augustinian notion of the will, in which the will already has an independent role of its own.

What kind of structure does Olivi see in the practical syllogism? On the face of it, Olivi’s example does not seem to follow the Aristotelian pattern from *EN* VII.3, 1147a 25–35. The universal premise is similar to that of Aristotle’s: “It is wrong for a human being to fornicate”. But the particular premise is not “Performing this action is to fornicate”,<sup>15</sup> as one might expect, but “It is wrong for me to fornicate now”. Thus, the structure of the intellectual process Olivi presents can be depicted as follows:

It is wrong for a human being to fornicate.  
It is wrong for me to fornicate now.  
An act of will adverse to fornicating.

In other words, the intellect in this case applies a universal moral principle to a particular human being – “to me” – and not to a particular act. This is important. Olivi’s idea seems to be that a universal moral principle does not have a sufficient force to turn into action. It needs to be particularized, so that it applies to a particular human being, to “me”, who ponders whether something ought to or ought not to be done. A universal principle must be actually understood as a principle that concerns me right now; only then does it have some relevance in directing my action.

In this respect, Olivi’s example is not a typical practical syllogism. Actually, it is not a syllogism at all: the universal premise does not seem to do anything in the process, and the act of the will could be brought about on the basis of the particular premise alone.<sup>16</sup> This is

<sup>14</sup> KENT, *Aristotle and the Franciscans*, cit., p. 187.

<sup>15</sup> For instance, Thomas Aquinas, in his *De malo* q. 3, a. 9, ad 7, employs the proposition “hic actus est fornicatio” as a minor premise, THOMAS AQUINAS, *Quaestiones disputatae de malo*, Sancti Thomae de Aquino opera omnia iussu Leonis XIII P.M. edita, tom. 23, Commissio Leonina/Vrin, Roma/Paris 1982.

<sup>16</sup> In Olivi’s example, my intellect entertains a universal moral principle and then understands it as applying to me right now. This process can of course be put into a syllogistic form by adding a premise, which is absent from Olivi’s text: “I am a human being” (in *EN* 1147a 1-4 Aristotle points out that this may be a minor premise too). Following this lead, the structure of the syllogism would be as follows:

It is wrong for a human being to fornicate.  
I am a human being.

It is wrong for me to fornicate now.

Only after this reasoning, might we go on and construe something that is reminiscent of an Aristotelian practical syllogism by adding further elements that are missing from Olivi’s text:

It is wrong for me to fornicate now.  
Performing X is to fornicate.

puzzling, and we may only conjecture the reason for Olivi's misinterpretation of Aristotle's idea: perhaps he did not have Aristotle's text but some faulty commentary before him when he wrote this passage, or he may have been just paraphrasing Aristotle's idea from memory—a practise that was not unusual at the time. Be that as it may, it is important to note that when Olivi wrote the above passage, he probably was not even interested in paraphrasing Aristotle correctly, because his interest in the passage lies elsewhere – he is not analysing the structure of a practical syllogism but criticizing the Aristotelian idea that reasoning determines the will. From this perspective, it is not surprising that Olivi's treatment of the structure of the practical syllogism is rather idiosyncratic.

Another important aspect that we see in Olivi's description of the practical syllogism is that he seems to read Aristotle as saying that the conclusion is not an intellectual judgement. The intellect does not form the conclusion "X ought to be done" which would then determine that the will strives for X. There is no intellectual conclusion, just a process of reasoning (i.e., putting together two premises). But the conclusion is not an action either. It is *an act of the will*. This is clearly a misunderstanding of Aristotle, because the will figures in the process of practical reasoning as an independent faculty. To be sure, according to Olivi action follows from an act of the will if nothing prevents it, but still he makes a non-Aristotelian move by adding the will to the structure of the practical reasoning, as I have already indicated.

It is also noteworthy, that Olivi's interpretation of Aristotle deviates from Aquinas' theory of practical reasoning. According to Aquinas, the intellect forms a practical syllogism, the conclusion of which is an act of the intellect, an intellectual proposition concerning things to be done. This proposition then functions as a formal cause of an act of the will, and turns thus into action.<sup>17</sup> This is not the view Olivi presents in the passage cited above. Rather, the counter-argument Olivi paraphrases has it that the conclusion of a practical syllogism is directly an act of the will. Thus, in Olivi's eyes, Aristotle puts forth a very strongly deterministic theory of the relation between the intellect and the will, and Olivi cannot accept it: he rejects it as heretical. Angrily and self-confidently, he points out that Aristotle seems to understand the will as a passive potency that is determined by the intellect, "and yet Aristotle never proves any of these, and if he does I want to hear his demonstration, and then I shall answer to it".<sup>18</sup> Olivi's main point is that intellectual considerations cannot determine the will: "However much the intellect actually considers and knows – both universally and particularly – that doing this or not doing this is a good or a bad thing and that it should be avoided or pursued: nevertheless the will can do whatever".<sup>19</sup> Thus, Olivi denies what he takes to be an Aristotelian theory of the relation be-

It is wrong for me to perform X now.

However, it does not seem to me that this is what Olivi is doing in the passage cited above. To be sure, he is not even trying to analyse the structure of a practical syllogism, since the question he is interested in is whether intellectual considerations determine the will.

<sup>17</sup> THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa Theologiae*, ed. P. Caramello, Marietti, Turin 1948-50 (hereafter *ST*), Ia IIae. 9.1; *Ibid.*, 13.1.

<sup>18</sup> «[...] et tamen nihil horum Aristoteles unquam probat, quodsi hoc facit, eius probationem audire desidero et tunc respondebo ad eam» (*II Sent.* q. 57, vol. II, p. 356.).

<sup>19</sup> «Quantumcunque enim intellectus et in generali et in particulari consideret et sciat actu hoc facere vel non



tween the will and the intellect. He does not accept Aristotle's version of the practical syllogism, because he thinks that it determines the will in an untenable way.

Let us, however, return to Olivi's understanding of the intellectual process that is depicted by the practical syllogism and cited above. In fact, more than the practical syllogism from *EN*, Olivi's example resembles the one Aristotle presents in *DA* III.11, 434a17-21, which goes as follows:

Since the one premise or judgement is universal and the other deals with the particular (for the first tells us that such and such a kind of man should do such and such a kind of act, and the second that this is an act of the kind meant, and I a person of the type intended), it is the latter opinion that really originates movement, not the universal; or rather it is both [...].<sup>20</sup>

We see that here Aristotle includes the particular subject in the minor premise, just like Olivi in his own version. But there seems to be at least one difference between this example from Aristotle, and the one Olivi puts forth: in Aristotle's example, the minor premise of practical reasoning includes a particular action ("this act") – or perhaps there are two minor premises, one of which includes a particular action. Either way, the subject is thus provided with knowledge of an act, which he/she then performs. In Olivi's example, the subject seems only to apply the universal moral principle to his/her own case but does *not* seem to reason about any particular action.<sup>21</sup> However, this may only be a careless formulation on Olivi's part, because the latter formulation of the practical syllogism, which Olivi presents at the end of the passage cited above, clearly includes a particular action that the subject entertains and performs.

## 2. More (about) practical syllogisms

Olivi discusses practical syllogism more extensively in questions 85 and 86 of his question-commentary on the Sentences. His main concern in these questions is, again, whether intellectual considerations determine the will and whether the intellect can be bound by passions to the extent that it makes a mistake when considering the right course of action.

facere esse bonum vel malum, fugiendum vel prosequendum: adhuc voluntas potest in quodcunque» (*II Sent.* q. 57, vol. II, p. 356.).

<sup>20</sup> *DA* III.11, 434a 17-20; Moerbeke's translation goes as follows: «Quoniam autem hec quidem uniuersalis existimatio et ratio, alia uero particularis (hec quidem enim dicit quod oportet talem tale agere, hec autem quod hoc quidem tale et ego talis), iam hec mouet opinio, non que uniuersalis; aut utraque [...]»; Immediately after the passage cited above, Olivi refers to *DA* III, and although it is not obvious that he has chapter 11 in mind, there is no doubt that he is familiar with it. However, Olivi clearly presents his example (*malum esse hominem fornicari*) in relation to *EN*. *DA* is presented only as a further and less explicit proof of Aristotle's stance. Olivi's example has much in common also with the one Aristotle gives in *De motu animalium* 7, 701a 6–701b, where Aristotle says, for instance, that obvious premises, such as "I am human", do not have to be thought in actuality.

<sup>21</sup> This is the case unless we read Olivi's example as if the word *fornicari* meant a particular action of committing adultery by doing X with person E right now. This does not seem to me a very plausible reading, especially with regard to the universal premise. Then again, we could read the passage as *fornicari* having a universal meaning in the major premise and referring to a particular action in the minor. This would be in line with Aristotle's example from *DA* III, and it is possible that Olivi means something like this.

He takes up once again Aristotle's example from *EN* VII. 3, and this time he is more precise:

Aristotle says [...] that when a universal and a singular opinion or proposition are apprehended simultaneously and in actuality so that one syllogism is formed out of them, then in the speculative intellect there necessarily follows a conclusion, and in practical matters (*in factivis seu practicis*) there necessarily and immediately follows an action. And, in the same place, Aristotle gives an example of this, namely, if the intellect actually estimates that everything sweet ought to be tasted and together with this believes singularly and actually that this is sweet: then it necessarily must move to taste it, unless the human being is prevented by something else.<sup>22</sup>

Here, Olivi interprets Aristotle slightly differently than in question 57. He does not bring the will into the picture but reads Aristotle as saying that the conclusion of the practical syllogism is directly action.<sup>23</sup> Now, in principle, Olivi seems to be favourable towards the idea, that the thinking process behind action can be depicted as a practical syllogism. He thinks that our reasoning about our future actions oftentimes follows the structure of a practical syllogism in such a way that we entertain universal principles and apply them to particular situations, when we try to figure out what we should do. He only opposes – rather fiercely, I must say – the idea that the conclusion of such a reasoning process is action or an act of will. His disagreement with this tenet of Aristotle's model stems from his conception of the freedom of the will and from certain theological problems which follow from Aristotle's view<sup>24</sup>.

However, there are also other important ways in which Olivi deviates from Aristotle's theory. He takes up the issue of incontinent action and argues that Aristotle understood it in a following way:<sup>25</sup> A person may entertain two major premises: one saying that "It is inap-

<sup>22</sup> «Dicit Aristoteles [...] quod, quando opinio seu propositio universalis et singularis simul actu apprehenduntur, ita quod una syllogistica ratio fiat ex ipsis: tunc in speculativo intellectu necessario sequitur conclusio et in factivis seu practicis necessario et confestim sequitur opus. Et dat de hoc ibidem exemplum, utpote, si intellectus actualiter aestimet quod omne dulce est gustandum et cum hoc in singulari et actualiter credat hoc esse dulce: tunc necessario habet moveri ad illud gustandum et ad gustare, nisi homo per aliquod aliud prohibeatur» (*II Sent.* q. 86, vol. III, p. 187; Olivi's answer to question 85 can be found from question 86).

<sup>23</sup> One of the *quod sic* -arguments from question 85 can be read as proposing the same kind of interpretation that we saw in question 57: the conclusion of the practical syllogism is an act of the will: «ergo quando ratio in universali et in particulari actu dicit et imperat hoc esse agendum, oportet voluntatem et appetitum sensualem necessario moveri ad illud agendum» (*II Sent.* q. 85, vol. III, p. 186.). On the other hand, the expression "in particulari actu dicit" may refer to the conclusion instead of the minor premise: in this case, the idea would be that the intellect entertains a universal premise; a particular premise; and a propositional conclusion that says "This particular act X ought to be done", and the will would necessarily have to will for that act to be done. Be that as it may, Olivi does not present this argument as Aristotle's, and so it is probable that it comes from some contemporary thinker.

<sup>24</sup> The theological problem Olivi discusses in questions 85-6 is the following: If Aristotle is right, and the process of practical reasoning precedes and necessitates action or acts of the will (in the theological issue Olivi seems to again incorporate the will into the psychological process), we face a problem with regard to the fall of Lucifer and Adam. Either they were necessitated by their intellectual mistakes, in which case their actions were not culpable, or their fallacious thinking was in itself sinful, and thus they in fact sinned before their first sins. Both of these options are unacceptable according to Olivi, and consequently Aristotle's theory must be rejected. See *II Sent.* q. 86, vol. III, pp. 188-9; For Olivi's view on the fall of Lucifer, see also *II Sent.* q. 40-43, vol. I, pp. 683-734.

<sup>25</sup> This is a traditional intellectualist interpretation of Aristotle's *akratic* person. For discussion, BOSTOCK, *Aristotle's Ethics*, cit., pp. 123-42; DESTRIÈRE, *Aristotle on the Causes of Akrasia*, cit., pp. 143-4. For references to modern advocates of this interpretation, *Ibid.*, p. 140 n2.

propriate to eat sweet things” and the other that “Everything sweet is pleasant”. Now, if the person has a strong desire, she combines the minor premise, “This is sweet”, with the latter major premise, and thus eats the sweet thing.<sup>26</sup> We may illustrate the process in the following way:

It is inappropriate to eat sweet things.	Everything sweet is pleasant.
	\
	This is sweet.
	Thus, the person eats “this”.

Olivi thinks that this means in practise that the person in question does not actually know or think that she should not eat “this sweet thing”. She knows in a universal way that she should not eat sweet things, but this knowledge is not actual in relation to the particular object she is facing.

In contrast to this, Olivi presents various vivid illustrations which he supposes to show that this is not the case:

Second, this is attested to by a complex and forceful experience we all have when we sin: we realize actually and in particular the particular good deeds that we then omit and the particular burdens (*aggravationes*) of the sins that we then perform. For does not the one who renounces religion or faith anew, or corrupts his virginity, or wrongfully kills or betrays his companion, realize perfectly well the good deeds he neglects and the bad deeds he commits?<sup>27</sup>

The same idea is presented with the same vivid style also in another context:

For when some *magister* – who is very well informed about the principles (*rationibus*) of the divine laws and of moral virtues and vices – steals; kills somebody; or fornicates, who will say that he cannot by his reason think and understand in actuality that his action is against the law of God and against reason, even when he commits the act due to a vicious habit?<sup>28</sup>

I think that few of us would deny to Olivi’s observation. Often, we are painfully aware that what we are doing is wrong, and almost as often, we are aware of what course of action we should be taking instead; one does not even have to be a trained theologian to be capable of this. According to Olivi’s interpretation, Aristotle’s theory cannot account for this phenomenon: if one really knows a deed to be wrong, one does not do it.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>26</sup> *II Sent.* q. 86, vol. III, p. 187. Note that Olivi reads Aristotle as saying that both major premises are active in the mind of the person.

<sup>27</sup> «Secundo, convincit hoc multiplex experimentum quo omnes nimis experimur nos, dum peccamus, actualiter et in particulari advertere bona particularia agenda quae tunc omitimus et particulares aggravationes peccatorum quae tunc committimus. Nunquid enim de novo a religione vel fide apostatans aut suam virginatam corrumpens aut socium suum enormiter occidens vel prodens optime advertit bona a quibus cadit et mala quae committit?» (*II Sent.* q. 86, vol. III, p. 190).

<sup>28</sup> «Quis enim dicet quod aliquis magister secundum intellectum valde peritus in rationibus divinarum legum et moralium virtutum et vitiorum, non possit per rationem actu cogitare et intelligere quod hoc est contra legem Dei et contra rationem, quamvis talia ex habitu vitioso faciat?» (*II Sent.* q. 57, vol. II, p. 361).

<sup>29</sup> I do not claim that Olivi’s interpretation of Aristotle’s theory is correct. As I have already indicated, Aris-

Olivi argues that in order to know that the action one performs is wrong one has to entertain not only the universal premise, “Fornicating is wrong”, but also the particular premise, “Performing this act is to fornicate”, and both of these must be understood in actuality, not only habitually. Moreover, the person who fornicates is fully able to draw the conclusion from these premises:

[...] a sinner can know and think in actuality the universal proposition concerning the good that is contrary to his sin. From this, it follows that he can similarly think about the particular [...] at least, because he can compare the act and the object of his sin to the universal proposition he actually thinks. For example, a fornicator actually thinks that his fornication is pleasant to him [...] and he thinks in a universal way that every act of fornication is immoral, prohibited by God, and worth eternal punishment. Therefore, if he actually compares his particular act of fornication to the proposition which says that every act of fornication is illicit: then it is impossible that he does not by the same token (*eo ipso*) know and think in a particular way that his particular act of fornication is illicit. Moreover, he can necessarily infer this syllogistically from the first <premise>, namely, in the following way: “Every act of fornication is illicit”, “but this act of mine is an act of fornication”— for it is conceded that he thinks and knows both of these in actuality. But from these, it is necessarily concluded: “Therefore, my act of fornication is illicit”.<sup>30</sup>

Yet, since the person in question actually commits the act, which he knows to be illicit and worthy of eternal punishment, he has to see something good in it. Olivi does not think that human beings could strive for something which they conceive of as absolutely bad as if they did not see anything good in it.<sup>31</sup> The illicit act of fornicating must be, say, pleasant, and the person who decides to fornicate must conceive of this action as such if he is able to choose it.

How is this possible, given that the person already conceives his act as bad (because illicit)? Olivi’s answer is that the intellect can think about many things simultaneously.<sup>32</sup> He

totle’s view is far from clear in this respect.

<sup>30</sup> «[...] peccans potest universalem propositionem boni peccato suo contrarii actualiter scire et cogitare. Ex hoc enim sequitur quod consimiliter potest particularem cogitare [...] ex hoc quod saltem actum et obiectum sui peccati potest comparare ad illam universalem propositionem quam actu cogitat. Ut verbi gratia, ecce fornicator actu cogitat quod sua fornicatio est sibi delectabilis [...] et in universali cogitat quod omnis fornicatio est inhonesta et a Deo prohibita et poenae aeternae promeritiva. Si igitur actu comparat suam particularem fornicationem ad illam propositionem qua dicit quod omnis fornicatio est illicita: impossibile est quin eo ipso in particulari cognoscat et cogitet quod sua particularis fornicatio est illicita. Praeterea, ipse potest eam syllogistice ex prima necessario inferre, utpote, sic: Omnis fornicatio est illicita; sed haec actio mea est fornicatio, utramque enim istarum conceditur actu cogitare et scire; sed ex his necessario concluditur, ergo haec mea fornicatio est illicita» (*II Sent.* q. 86, vol. III, pp. 190-1).

<sup>31</sup> *II Sent.* q. 57, vol. II, pp. 353-4, 356-61; KENT, *Aristotle and the Franciscans*, cit., p. 186.

<sup>32</sup> The idea Olivi opposes is that the intellect is incapable of thinking one and the same thing as good and as bad, or as eligible and as detestable simultaneously. He does not refer to any particular thinker, but he may have Aquinas in mind. Although Aquinas too allows the intellect to think several things simultaneously insofar as they are thought as one thing and not as many (see, e.g., *ST Ia.* 85.4.), he does not think that the intellect would be capable of presenting one and the same thing simultaneously as good and as bad. An object may be good and bad in different respects—good because pleasant and bad because illicit. By concentrating on different aspects of the object, we may conceive it as good and as bad, but as we are incapable of concentrating on different aspects simultaneously, we cannot conceive it as both good and bad. It seems either desirable or appalling; it cannot seem as both to us at the same time.

presents many cases which he takes to be incomprehensible unless the intellect is attributed with the capability to think many things at the same time. To begin with, it must be capable of thinking both end-terms of a proposition (such as “man” and “animal” in a proposition: “A man is an animal”) or a relation if it is to understand the proposition or relation. Also, the premises and conclusion of a syllogism are thought of simultaneously, yet they are distinct things. Moreover, the intellect can entertain opposing premises simultaneously, for example, by thinking two universal premises together with one particular premise, the latter in opposition to one of the universal premises. And finally, the intellect can know two opposing particular premises in relation to one and the same object at the same time, only if the premises pertain to the object in different respects. Thus, one can think “This X is good (because it is pleasant)” and “This X is not good (because it is morally wrong)”.<sup>33</sup> These particular premises represent the object X simultaneously as good and as bad but in different respects. Thus, the intellect does not hold contraries to be true, but still we are able to conceive an object as good and as bad at the same time.<sup>34</sup>

Because the intellect is able to think several premises, both universal and particular, at the same time, and it is able to draw conclusions from these premises, it can also come to conclusions that are suggestive of different courses of action, and further lead the subject to different acts. Basically, the intellect is able to form several practical syllogisms simultaneously. For example, it can think in following way:

<sup>33</sup> *II Sent.* q. 86, vol. III, pp. 189-90. Olivi argues that even Aristotle admits that the intellect has the ability to think contrary things simultaneously to some extent: as we have seen, Olivi reads Aristotle as saying that an incontinent person actually entertains two universal premises, and because of an occurring passion the person puts the minor premise under only one of these. The crucial issue is that according to Olivi’s reading both universal premises are *active* in the person’s mind. Olivi goes on to point out that «qua ratione particularis scientia vel opinio dicens hoc esse bonum edere, in quantum dulce, potest stare cum universali scientia vel opinione in universali dicente hoc non esse bonum secundum rationem honesti vel temperati; eadem ratione potest stare cum particulari scientia vel opinione dicente hoc non esse bonum secundum rationem honesti, quia haec particulari ita parum sibi contrariatur sicut sua universalis [...]» (*II Sent.* q. 86, vol. III, pp.189-90). It is not evident that this reasoning applies to Aristotle for two reasons. First, it is not clear whether Aristotle thinks that *both* universal premises are active; and second, because in Aristotle’s example the minor premise *is not contrary* to either of the major premises. “This is sweet” is contrary neither to “Everything sweet ought to be tasted” nor to “No sweet thing ought to be tasted”. Moreover, there seems to be some sort of confusion in Olivi’s exposition of the premises that should be contrary to each other: the universal premise cannot say that *hoc* is not good (because morally wrong), since universal premises are not supposed to incorporate particular objects. Of course, he may use the pronoun to refer to a general type of action (such as *fornicari*) and not to a particular act of fornicating.

<sup>34</sup> There are several places in which Olivi discusses the ability to think several things simultaneously. See, e.g., *II Sent.* q. 37, vol. I, pp. 657-60; *Ibid.*, q. 55, vol. II, pp. 286-7; *Ibid.*, q. 57, pp. 340-1; *Ibid.*, pp. 356-7; *Ibid.*, q. 78-79, vol. III, pp. 157-62; *Ibid.*, q. 86, pp. 189-90. See also PETRUS IOANNIS OLIVI, *Quodlibeta quinque*, ed. S. Defraia, *Collectio Oliviana VII*, Collegium S. Bonaventurae ad Claras Aquas, Grottaferrata 2002, V.8, p. 320, where Olivi answers to the question of whether a person who utters some ceremonial or ritual formula (*officium*), for instance, as in a sacrament, should fully concentrate on the formula while he utters the words. Olivi says that: «nullus tenetur sic attente officium dicere, quod nihil aliud cogitet uel attendat [...] quia hoc vix alicui huius vite est possibile; sufficit ergo quedam communis attentio, secundum humanam fragilitatem sobrie moderata». Rather than being unable to think several different things simultaneously, human beings are almost incapable of thinking only one thing at a time.

It is morally wrong to fornicate.		Fornicating gives pleasure.
	\                    /	
	Committing X is to fornicate	
Committing X is morally wrong		Committing X gives pleasure

Having all these propositions and conclusions in mind, the person in this difficult moral situation may consider what he should do either by trying to figure out which of the options (to do or not to do X) seems better to him or by simply deciding by his will what he really wills to do. Either way, it is the will which makes the decision freely.

### 3. Conclusion

To conclude, Olivi accepts the Aristotelian practical syllogism as a correct description of the reasoning process that is behind some of our actions. However, he denies the idea that the conclusion is an action or an act of the will; rather, the conclusion is a thought concerning a particular course of action in which the action is seen in a certain light. The conclusion is a certain way of apprehending a particular action, and the intellect is (under the guidance of the will) able to form several different conclusions with regard to one and the same action. The course of action a person takes is determined by the will and its choice. The will is able to direct the intellect to consider the action in a certain way – to make it conceive of the action as pleasant rather than as illicit – but it cannot, at least in all cases, make the intellect to completely lose sight of the other aspects of the action.<sup>35</sup> This is what happens when the person in question is too well aware of the fact that the act is illicit: remember the *magister*, who cannot forget that it is morally wrong to fornicate, yet still performs the illicit act. The *magister* decides by his will what he wants to do, and the will directs the intellect to concentrate on those aspects of the action which make it more eligible. Because the intellect presents fornicating as good (because pleasant), the *magister* is able to choose to fornicate by his will; and at the same time he is painfully aware that the act he is performing is worth eternal punishment, because it is forbidden by God.

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<sup>35</sup> Kent argues that in Olivi's theory the will can force the intellect to conceive an act or an object in a certain way (KENT, *Aristotle and the Franciscans*, cit., pp. 201-2). This is partially true, because the will really has such ability according to Olivi. But in light of the examples Olivi uses, it seems that this ability is not always fully realized. The *magister* would very likely want to forget that his action of fornicating is morally wrong, but he is unable to do so.

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