SYNDERSIS AND CONSCIENCE: STOICISM
AND ITS MEDIEVAL TRANSFORMATIONS

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Author argues that the conscience is a theme frequently flagged as a key aspect of Stoicism. Beyond mere consciousness, our self-awareness as agents, moral and otherwise, conscience specifies the ethical norms we honor in judging our experience and acting on it. Scholars have studied how the Stoics think we acquire these norms, how we apply them in concrete individual cases, and how we estimate this practice, prospectively or retrospectively, examining our conscience and steeling ourselves to the difficulties of acting in its light. Whether these processes depend on Ancient Stoic monopsychism – the notion that the soul has no subdivisions or infrarational faculties – has also drawn attention. In tracking its medieval fortunes, whether in Stoic or modified form, we will note as well some of the related ideas with which this doctrine traveled.

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Individual Stoics were not equally interested in the psychodynamics of self-knowledge and they were far from consistent or systematic when they addressed it, a lack of consensus duly reflected by modern commentators. Patristic and medieval authors were also selective. If, with Tertullian’s *Seneca saepe noster* and Dante’s *Seneca morale*, they sometimes named names, they also absorbed many Stoic doctrines indirectly, without identity-tags. If they processed Stoicism through a biblical template, they also processed the Bible through a philosophical template. The traffic was a two-way street. If and when traffic signs were posted, they were not always heeded or enforced. Some doctrines taught by the Stoics, among others, retained their vigor and identity across the post-classical divide. The Delphic injunction, “Know thyself,” is a salient example. Also notable in this regard are right reason or natural law as a source of universally accessible moral norms, casuistic considerations in applying them, and intentionality as the essence of the moral act. All were invoked as criteria in self-examination, in classical Latin authors who were not professed Stoics, and in patristic and medieval authors.

If some Stoic notions survived more or less intact, others, like oxygen, remained inert unless combined with other elements, philosophical or theological. Critical here is St. Paul on conscience. While the Apostle defends a natural moral law whose accessibility is part of our general human endowment, he regards it as innate, inscribed on the fleshy tablets of the heart. Other biblical authors

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also locate ethical values in the heart. Like Paul, they often lament the ways we besmirch our heart, and seek its purification. They agree that the recovery of a clean heart requires divine aid as well as human effort, and obedience not only to natural law but also to a divine law that may or may not coincide with it. Finally, while St. Paul acknowledges the possibility of good conscience, for him the examination of conscience typically exposes our shortcomings, often reflecting the strife between flesh and spirit. The basic function of this exercise is to alert us to our sins, inspiring remorse and the wish to repent and do better. In these respects, St. Paul and other biblical authors reinforce some aspects of Stoicism on conscience while offering a striking alternative to it.  

The Stoics themselves present a range of menu options on how we acquire basic moral norms. Choices include empirical evidence; innate, self-evident, or intuited first principles; seminal reasons implanted at birth that become rational norms as we mature, whether more or less automatically, under the guidance of a tutelary daimon metaphorical or otherwise, or the teaching

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and example of the wise; conclusions derived from experience; analogical reasoning; or some assortment of the above. Scholars assign different weights to these possibilities, including alternatives found within individual Stoic authors.4

4 On moral norms derived from sense data albeit with a momentary lapse into innatism in Chrysippus, followed by Epictetus, many scholars have followed F. H. Sandbach, “Ennoia and Prolêpsis in the Stoic Theory of Knowledge,” in Problems in Stoicism, ed. Anthony A. Long (London: Athlone Press, 1971 [first pub. 1930]), 44-51, at 28-30. On Chrysippean empiricism, see Josiah B. Gould, The Philosophy of Chrysippus (Albany: SUNY Press, 1970), 62-64, 167, although he states, at 170, “Any assertions concerning the origin of moral goodness—or genuine knowledge about good things and bad things—can but conjecture.” This warning has rarely been observed. Among those convinced that Stoic empiricism rules out innatism, self-evidence, or a priorism of any kind, see André-Jean Voelke, L’idée de la volonté dans le Stoïcisme (Paris: PUF, 1973), 43; he also regards the eupatheiai as a point of transition from oikeiosis to mature rational apatheiai, at 61-65. Matt Jackson-McCabe, “The Stoic Theory of Implanted Preconceptions,” Phronesis 44 (2004): 323-47, sees Chryssippus on implanted moral principles as expressing a standard, not an aberrant, view, reprimed by Seneca and Epictetus; but he also describes them as seminal reasons brought to fruition by analogical reasoning and as not incompatible with a tabula rasa epistemology in other respects. Brad Inwood, Reading Seneca: Stoic Philosophy at Rome (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005), 270-301, reasserts empiricism as the fundamental Stoic position yet argues for seminal reasons as implanting moral principles developed via sense experience, moral examples, and analogous reasoning. For Christopher Gill, The Structured Self in Hellenistic and Roman Thought (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 132-33, 146-50, 157-62, 164-65, 181, what is innate is a universal aptitude for developing moral principles, which occurs through our complex processing of experience, teaching, and example. He includes here Epictetus, at 159-60, as vs. Anthony A. Long, Epictetus: A Stoic and Socratic Guide to Life (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002), 81-82, 101-2, 113-16, who gives the strongest defense to date for fully formed innate moral norms in Epictetus; from this perspective the development of a mature moral sense is a non-event. At the same time, Long’s stress on the need to read Epictetus’ ethics in the light of his theology, at 142-72, 180, 186-88, makes his “spark of the divine” view of the human soul more than a metaphor for natural human reason, seeing a tutelary divine presence supervising our moral choices as tantamount to conscience, at 186-87. Equally, however, Long argues,
One idea all Stoics unite in opposing is Aristotle’s explanation of how we act against the principles we hold to be right. The *locus classicus* for this theory, called *akrasia*, is *Nicomachean Ethics* Book 7. Aristotle sees *akrasia* as an aberration in the behavior of a habitually virtuous person whose grasp of correct moral first principles is not in doubt. Drawing on Plato’s view that our souls are tripartite, possessing spirit and passion as well as intellect, Aristotle sees *akrasia* as a temporary disconnect between our intellect, the seat of our moral norms, and either of our other two mental faculties. We are momentarily sidetracked. The result is a physical reaction that overwhelms us. It interferes with our ability to receive and to process sense data accurately, and to draw correct conclusions when we apply our moral principles to concrete cases. Thus, we act wrongly or fail to act rightly. Once we realize that this is the case, we experience regret. Aristotle then discusses how akratic behaviors can be corrected, and how our normal cognitive functions, and hence our normal decision-making activity, can be restored. Many of his medieval and modern commentators tend to read Aristotle’s *akrasia* less as a somatic disturbance than as a problem in falla-
cious reasoning. But the Stoics, rejecting the tripartite soul and the mind-body problem as such, were the leading critics of Aristotle’s doctrine of akrasia. They offered their own teaching on conscience as an alternative to it.\(^5\)

Modern commentators on the Stoic doctrine of conscience emphasize the Roman Stoics, and with good reason. The single most important Roman Stoic on conscience is Seneca.\(^6\) This is not because he had a systematic theory, despite some scholarly efforts to provide him with one. Seneca was more accessible to post-classical European thinkers than the other Roman Stoics, and not only because he was the only one of them to write in Latin. Like most of them, and unlike Marcus Aurelius, he was a man who lived under authority, not a divus princeps limited only by the burdens and hazards of imperial office. Unlike Epictetus and his master Musonius Rufus, Seneca was

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a moderate, not an ethical rigorist. And, while he inherited a standard Stoic syllabus on conscience, Seneca enlarged it, adding topics and terminology not found in earlier or later Stoics, yielding positions that could offer a shock of recognition to patristic and medieval Christians.

The theme to which Seneca made the most original contribution, and the theme attracting the most scholarly debate about his later influence, is Seneca on the will. I will treat him only briefly here, so as not to preempt the contribution to this conference which I am scheduled to make tomorrow. While Seneca agrees with the Stoic principle that our virtues and vices express the voluntary choices we make, based on our intellectual judgments on what is good or bad, he recognizes that our good will can be frustrated or delayed by habituation to vice. Thus, good will and bad will can occupy the same psychic space. When we realize that we are in such a state, we flagellate ourselves for acting against conscience. For when we do wrong we are well aware of the wrong we do. Seneca thus recognizes that we can act against conscience, deliberately and consciously, and observes that we inflict mental suffering on ourselves when we do so. Like other Stoics, he offers a miscellany of conditions promoting that negative state: unhealthy tonos (or flabby moral muscle tone, so to speak), laziness, ignorance, inattention, complacency, moral obtuseness, bad habits, the bad example of others, and the like. These claims all have the effect of pushing the question one step backward rather than answering it. This issue of the etiology of conscientious decision-making is one seized on by post-classical thinkers. Their analyses resonate with and amplify Seneca. Some of the most influential figures triggering medieval discussions of conscience are among the most, and the least, coherent on its psychodynamics. This paradox applies to the three most salient patristic figures in the sequel: Ambrose, Augustine, and Jerome.

Of these, Ambrose is the richest source for the range of patristic senses given to conscientia. He attaches three different meanings to this term. It can signify, simply, consciousness of our inner states, which a sage can perceive in himself and others. It can signify St. Paul’s innate judge of sin. Conscience can
also be the sage’s tranquil awareness of his own virtue, even in the face of external criticism and misunderstanding. One of Ambrose’s most widely-read works, his *De officiis*, covers all these bases.\(^7\) His commentary on Psalm 118, also influential, describes—as the Psalmists do—conscience as judging our sins.\(^8\) On the other hand, Ambrose’s treatises on the Old Testament patriarchs focus repeatedly on the good conscience of the upright. These treatises originated as sermons preparing catechumens for baptism. Hence, their upbeat character. The patriarchs are *exempla virtutis*, examples of virtue whom lay converts, as new Israelites and fellow-citizens of the saints, can actually imitate. A motivational speaker, Ambrose accents his auditors’ intellectual and volitional abilities.\(^9\) Yet, we must note that the readership of these latter works soon shrank, given the post-classical disappearance of adult converts from Roman paganism and the growing practice of infant baptism.

In his own way, Augustine reflects both dependence on and independence from the Stoic view of conscience and its underpinnings. With Lactantius, he is alone among early Latin Christian writers in appropriating with approval their doctrine of the *hegemonikon*, the idea that the intellect is the unitary ruling principle of the human constitution, fully in control of

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sensation as well as of thought and volition. As an analogy of the Trinity, Augustine observes, our memory, intellect, and will are activities of a single subsistent mind. While their roles can be distinguished, they are functionally interdependent. Thus, in understanding how we make moral decisions, we cannot really speak of the priority of the intellect, or of the will, without falling into error on the co-equal Trinitarian persons in the unity of the Godhead. Among other things, this analysis alerts us to expect to find concepts such as “individual” and “person” located in the first instance in medieval discussions of Trinitarian theology and Christology. Augustine follows St. Paul on conscience as the mirror of sin and goes beyond him, in his late career, in limiting free will in any but our vicious choices. Despite its initial appeal, he ends by rejecting Stoic apatheia, freedom from irrational passions, and moral autarchy, as desirable or even as attainable states, redefining the norm of virtue as caritas, not rationality. In line with that point, Augustine’s fabled doctrine of the divided self is ultimately neither Pauline nor Senecan. He portrays his “O Lord, make me chaste, but not yet” condition in the Confessions as a metaphorical attraction to two desirable women. They represent two loves, love of self and love of God and neighbor, which will remain in tension in

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10 For Augustine on the hegemonikon and apatheia, see Colish, Stoic Tradition, 2:206-7, 2:236, 2:221-25; on the Trinitarian analogies in the human soul, see Augustine, De trinitate 8-14, ed. W. J. Mountain and Franciscus Glorie, CCSL 16 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1968). Medieval concepts of the individual refer literally to that which is undivided or in-divisible, be it a person, divine or human, who is a res per se una, or any entity not capable of internal subdivision regardless of its nature and perceived relationship with other entities possessing equivalent attributes, according to the logicians. On these points see, for the twelfth-century theological applications, especially the definition of persona of Gilbert of Poitiers and its influence, Marcia L. Colish, Peter Lombard (Leiden: Brill, 1994), 1:138-42, 1:151-54; for logical and other applications, see Susan R. Kramer and Caroline W. Bynum, “Revisiting the Twelfth-Century Individual: The Inner Self and the Christian Community,” in Das Eigene und das Ganze: Zum Individuellen im mittelalterlichen Religion, ed. Gert Melville and Markus Schürer (Münster: LIT, 2002), 57-85.
this life, in individuals and societies, like overlapping magnetic fields. Our best hope in via is to order well our loves.\footnote{11}

The third major Latin church father on conscience is Jerome. While scarcely an intellectual heavyweight, it is yet he who brings conscience and psychology together in the problematic and highly influential text that jump-starts scholastic discussions of synderesis and conscience in the twelfth century. To be sure, Jerome speaks of conscience generically, and loosely, as in his commentary on the Book of Wisdom. But the key passage is in his commentary on Ezekiel, lifted most likely from Origen. This text was reprised almost verbatim in the ninth century by Rabanus Maurus and excerpted by the exegete treating Ezekiel in the twelfth-century biblical Glossa ordinaria. Most influentially, Jerome is quoted and the topic made canonical in Peter Lombard’s Sentences.\footnote{12} The rest, as they say, is history, at least up through


\footnote{12} For Jerome’s generic use of conscience in the Book of Wisdom commentary, see Paul Antin, “Les idées morales de S. Jérôme,” in Recueil sur saint Jérôme (Bruxelles: Latomus, 1968), 334. The key passage is in Jerome, Commentariorum in Hezekielem libri XIV 1.1.6-8a, ed. Franciscus Glorie, CCSL 75 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1964). While she does not discuss Jerome’s Ezekiel commentary, Ruth Mellinkoff, The Mark of Cain (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), 1-21, 29-31, 40-50 notes that Jewish exegetes sometimes treat Cain as repentant and sometimes do not; unlike Jerome, most of the
John Duns Scotus in the early fourteenth century, after which the language of *synderesis* and conscience drops from the scholastic agenda, to be replaced by discussion of the norm of right reason.

Jerome makes several points in his Ezekiel commentary that provide grist for the scholastic mills. Conflating Plato’s three subdivisions of the soul as *logikon*, *thumikon*, and *epithumikon* with Aristotle’s intellectual, irascible, and concupiscible faculties, he equates them, respectively, with the man, the lion, and the ox in the church fathers and early Christian writers treat Cain as repentant, although such twelfth-century scholastics as Hugh of St. Victor and Peter Comestor regard him as an excommunicate condemned to eternal perdition. For what it is worth, Dante regards Cain as repentant and places him in Purgatory (*Purg. 14.133*) on the path to eventual salvation. The filiation of the key passage in Jerome’s Ezekiel commentary in medieval scholastics, without attention to their biblical exegesis, is surveyed by Michael G. Baylor, *Action and Person: Conscience in Late Scholasticism* (Leiden: Brill, 1977), 25-42, 48-69, (although he omits Bonaventure, Albert the Great, and Duns Scotus); Delhaye, *Conscience*, 106-18; Odon Lottin, “Syndérèse et conscience aux XIIe et XIIIe siècles,” *Psychologie et morale aux XIIe et XIIIe siècles*, 6 vols. (Louvain: Abbaye de Mont César, 1948-60), 2:103-350; Timothy Potts, *Conscience in Medieval Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980); idem, “Conscience,” in *The Cambridge History of Later Medieval Philosophy from the Recovery of Aristotle to the Disintegration of Scholasticism, 1100-1600*, ed. Norman Kretzmann et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 687-704; and Verbeke, *Presence of Stoicism*, 53-70. Douglas C. Langston, *Conscience and Other Virtues from Bonaventure to Macintyre* (University Park: Penn State University Press, 2001), 8, 23-62, reprises superficially the scholastic authors considered in this paper, but merely as a curtain-raiser for modern theories. In Hoffmann, Müller, and Perkams, ed., *Das Problem der Willensschwäche*, contributors typically treat conscience and how moral agents can act against it in the context of the weakness of will theme, starting with commentaries on Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics* in the mid-thirteenth century. The influence of Stoicism in the Middle Ages is not noted, as in Risto Saarinen, “Weakness of Will in the Renaissance and Reformation,” in *ibid.*, 331-53 at 331, 348-49, who thinks it was a Renaissance innovation. The editors, at 17-22, hold that scholastics on conscience as studied in their volume discuss it primarily in connection with original sin. I thank Mary Sirridge for this reference. On Origen as Jerome’s source, see Goulven Madec, *Saint Ambroise et la philosophie* (Paris: Études Augustiennes, 1974), 125-27 and Douglas Kries, “Origen, Plato,
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The fourth creature, the eagle, he identifies with two terms distinct in ancient philosophy, *synderesis* (or *synteresis*) and *conscientia*. Jerome offers no Latin translation of *synderesis*. Conflating these two terms, he defines *synderesis/conscientia* as the spark of reason (*scintilla rationis*) not extinguished in Cain, inspiring us to seek the good. This fourth mental faculty also enables us to acknowledge our sin when we fall, overcome by pleasure, fervor, or intellectual error. Like the eagle, it soars above the other faculties. It does not participate in their activities but corrects them when they go astray. There are notable problems in his account thus far. Jerome adds to them. Unlike the Cain of Genesis, his Cain does not display remorse following his sin. And, having asserted that the positive function of *synderesis/conscientia* is not extinguished, even in the worst of sinners, he observes, none the less, that we encounter people every day...
who seem to have no sense whatsoever of right and wrong, and who show no compunction for their misdeeds. It is easy to see why unpacking these confluations and contradictions would give Jerome’s scholastic successors much to ponder.

Starting in the twelfth century, the main context in which they did so was the psychogenesis of ethical acts. The scholastics generally agree with Jerome and Peter Lombard that the scintilla rationis is inextinguishable. Some, taking Jerome literally, combine him with Augustine on the hegemonikon, arguing that the spark of reason dwells in the highest intellectual faculty. With the advance of Aristotelianism, scholastics locate the spark of reason in the practical, not the theoretical, intellect. Following this line are William of Auvergne, Bonaventure, Albert the Great, Thomas Aquinas, Parisian masters of the late thirteenth century of all persuasions, and Duns Scotus.

Other debates flourished. Pace Jerome, the scholastics decide that synderesis and conscience are not the same thing. But how are we to understand each of them—as a faculty, a habitus in Aristotle’s sense, a power, a function, or an act? And, in the psychogenesis of ethical acts, what role does the will play, whether as the habitation of either synderesis or conscience, or in relation to the practical intellect?

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In the early thirteenth century, Philip the Chancellor offers a construct that many successors accept\(^\text{15}\). On whether synderesis is a habit or a faculty, he splits the difference, calling it a *potentia habitualis*. He locates it in the will, the affective faculty, pointing us toward the good. He also grants synderesis a cognitive function, although not a deliberative one: Its role is to grasp basic moral principles. And it does so intuitively, acknowledging these principles immediately, without having to think about them. For Philip, synderesis is infallible as well as inextinguishable. Still, the faculties it informs may disobey it. Philip also distinguishes synderesis from conscience, and influentially so. While synderesis grasps the first principles of ethics, the role of conscience is to apply these principles to the concrete ethical decisions made by the practical intellect and free will. In making those applications, however, conscience may be fallible.

In the second quarter of the century, John of La Rochelle largely seconds this position, although he locates synderesis in the intellect, not the will, and argues that conscience is an acquired, not an innate, *habitus*\(^\text{16}\). The followers of Alexander of Hales who authored the text called the *Summa Halensis* agree with Philip but add that, when it is understood simply as consciousness, conscience is neither a faculty nor a *habitus*. But it can be seen as the *habitus* enabling us to have that self-awareness, and as the faculty through which we experience it. In an ethical context, they regard conscience as both innate and acquired. But they also confuse matters by stating that, while synderesis informs conscience, conscience itself contains innate general principles in addition to applying to concrete cases those it receives from synderesis\(^\text{17}\).

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Writing in the mid-thirteenth century, Bonaventure is far clearer.\(^{18}\) Beginning his analysis with conscience, he states that it is a *habitus* lodged in the practical intellect. It guides the actions of the affective and operative faculty. Conscience is innate. But what it endows us with is an aptitude, rather than with full-fledged moral norms. What we are all born with is the capacity to grasp moral first principles when our minds are illuminated by the *lux naturalis*. This last-mentioned qualification, the natural light, is important. For it locates this topic in the context of Bonaventure’s pan-illuminationist epistemology, which regards divine illumination as necessary in all modes of human knowledge. At the same time, Bonaventure regards conscience as acquired, since the information on whose basis we grasp and act on first principles also comes from the senses. Thus, conscience deals both with general ethical norms and with their practical applications. For Bonaventure, *syndèrèse* is also a *habitus*. It is the efficient cause of the will. Its functions vis-à-vis the will parallel those of conscience vis-à-vis the practical intellect. In addition to being a *habitus*, each can

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also be called a power, a *potentia*. Since *synderesis* resides in the will, it can be impeded by voluntary foot-dragging as well as by our passions and blindness of spirit. But it cannot be extinguished. Conscience also can err, since, in guiding the practical intellect, it may make incorrect applications of general norms. This account, which accents our moral fallibility as well as the inextinguishability of our moral sense, is really the first to address Jerome’s *problématique* of the unrepentant Cain and the people who seem to lack any kind of moral compass, while situating the topic within Bonaventure’s distinctive illuminationist epistemology.

Albert the Great also offers a lucid, distinctive, and influential account. He begins with *synderesis*, defined as a natural and innate habitual power, a *vis cum habitu*, which furnishes inerrant and unexcogitated general moral principles to the practical intellect. *Synderesis* relays these principles to the conscience, which also inhabits the practical intellect. Conscience deals with concrete cases. It is an act, not a faculty or a *habitus*. With respect to our moral behavior, *synderesis* functions as the formal cause, conscience as the material cause. Albert frames these functions in terms of a deductive syllogism. *Synderesis* supplies the major premise. Informed by it,
practical reason supplies the minor premise, addressing the major premise to a concrete case. Conscience then draws the conclusion, providing a judgment on our duty to perform, or avoid, the act in question.

Thomas Aquinas adds but a few refinements to Albert’s position. He concedes, agreeing on this point with Alexander of Hales, that synderesis can be lost, in the case of madmen and mental defectives. Otherwise, it is retained by sinners, including the damned. While Aquinas holds that, in areas of ethics pertaining to supernature, faith must join with the intuition of synderesis for it to be right, in areas where natural reason and

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natural law suffice, *synderesis* rules alone. Following Albert’s syllogism analogy, he stresses that everything up to and including the judgment of conscience remains on the level of knowledge. In order to move from knowledge to act, free will must come into play. So, just as conscience can err in making specific applications of the general rules provided by *synderesis*, the will, too, may choose not to carry out the directives of conscience, whether they are correct or not. Error and sin can arise in both ways.

On the one side Bonaventure, and on the other side Albert as refined by Aquinas, largely define Franciscan and Dominican teaching on this theme in the last quarter of the thirteenth century. While there are faithful followers of both positions, eclecticism is equally evident. Many contemporary scholastics, whatever their allegiances, basically slice and dice, mix and match, without adding new insights\(^{21}\). This situation holds until the arrival of Duns Scotus, the last major scholastic to treat *synderesis* and conscience. Scotus puts a distinct authorial fingerprint on this topic while incorporating insights from both mendicant schools\(^{22}\). With the Dominicans, he locates both *synderesis* and


conscience in the practical intellect. It is both natural and innate. The moral principles it cognizes are self-evident; no Bonaventurian illuminationism is needed. Conscience applies these general principles to concrete cases. Both synderesis and conscience inform the will, stimulating it to choose the good when the will inclines to the good out of affection for justice. But the will is constrained neither by intellect, knowledge, synderesis, nor conscience. They are only partial causes of the will’s actions. For the will can act against conscience. Even when it does not do so, its acts can be motivated by advantage as well as by justice—a distinction Scotus borrows from Anselm of Canterbury. The bottom line, for Scotus as for his scholastic predecessors, is that the will must act freely. Thus, while the will may be inclined to follow the advice of conscience, we have no guarantee that it will do so. This Scotist solution, nicely balancing intellectualism with voluntarism, also preserves, notwithstanding an Aristotelian scholastic faculty psychology remote from Stoicism, an echo of the doctrine of the preferables taught by the Middle Stoic Panaetius, via the Ciceronian and Ambrosian doctrine of the honestum and the utile as recast by Augustine and Anselm. At the same time, Scotus shows his Aristotelian colors in citing justice as the short-hand index of virtue as an end in itself. His analysis, capitalizing on that of his scholastic forebears, offers a cogent account of how we make moral decisions, and answers the question, placed on the agenda by Seneca and problematized by Jerome, of how we can sin against conscience.

Ghent, and his view that the intellect acts determinately, on the basis of evidence or its absence, while the will’s actions are indeterminate. Cf. Langston, Conscience, 53, 59, who claims that Scotus lacks a position on conscience but who then, at 54, attributes one to him that draws on both Bonaventure and Aquinas. For the parallel with Anselm, see Eileen C. Sweeney, Anselm of Canterbury and the Desire for the Word (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 2012), 196-211, 225-32, 361-63.
Some of the Stoics propose thought-experiments as a heuristic or rhetorical device. Concluding with one of our own, let us hypothesize Seneca’s reaction were he brought back to life to review these post-classical discussions of *synderesis* and conscience. He might well find less troublesome than some modern commentators on Seneca himself the fact that some scholastics are able to combine innate ideas, self-evident principles grasped intuitively, and experience as sources of our moral norms. He would appreciate their attention to the psychodynamics of moral choice, and to intentionalism and free will. While dismissing their appropriation of Aristotle’s tripartite soul, he might even concede that their application of Aristotle’s distinction between the theoretical and practical intellect is a useful addendum to his own teaching. He would be alarmed by Jerome’s obfuscations and approve the scholastics’ efforts at clarification, even though *synderesis* is not a term in his own lexicon. Aware that these authors were Christians, he might yet be struck by how little their theology impinges on their handling of this topic. While they agree that humankind labors under the burden of original sin to a greater or lesser extent, their omission of that doctrine from their considerations of *synderesis* and conscience is a fact he would find noteworthy. In all, it is most likely that, in making this hypothetical survey of his own legacy on acting against conscience, Seneca would find more cause for satisfaction than for dismay. While recognizing that patristic and medieval thinkers have added new instruments and a new orchestration to his score, transposing his basic Stoic theme into a new key and composing new variations on it, he might well conclude that, in their hands, many of his favorite *Leitmotifs* remain fully audible, sounding, at the same time, both old and new.

**Notes**
The following abbreviations are used in this paper:
CCSL = Corpus christianorum series latina
CSEL = Corpus scriptorum ecclesiasticorum latinorum
SAEMO=Sancti Ambrosii episcopi mediolanensis opera