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CRITICAL THINKING AND MEDIEVAL ROMANCE

PENSIERO CRITICO E ROMANZO MEDIEVALE

Abstract

Nell'Europa occidentale, il ragionamento pratico costituisce una modalità di pensiero critico a partire dal XII secolo. Fino al XIII secolo, le scuole cattedrali lo trattano sotto la categoria della *prudentia* e lo insegnano nei termini della letteratura classica. Nel XIII secolo, gli sviluppi scolastici introducono la logica sillogistica con il termine *ratio practica*. I dibattiti interiori del romanzo cortese sono correlati agli sviluppi accademici e rappresentano il processo del ragionamento pratico. Trovandosi in conflitto, i narratori di finzione cercano di capire la cosa giusta da fare. La loro rappresentazione del ragionamento pratico presenta complicazioni esperienziali e la difficoltà di sostenere un'etica prescrittiva.

In Western Europe, practical reasoning constitutes a mode of critical thinking from the twelfth century on. Until the thirteenth century, cathedral schools treat it under the category of prudentia *and teach it in terms of classical literature. In the thirteenth century, scholastic developments introduce syllogistic logic with the term* ratio practica*. The inner debates of courtly romance correlate with academic developments and represent the process of practical reasoning. Finding themselves in conflict, fictional speakers try to figure out the right thing to do. Their representation of practical reasoning offers experiential complications and the difficulty of upholding prescriptive ethics.*

Keywords

Pensiero critico; ragionamento pratico; prudenza; romanzo cortese; dibattiti interiori

Critical Thinking; Practical Reasoning; Prudence; Courtly Romance; Inner Debates

Practical Reasoning, the deliberative process about things to be done, constitutes a mode of critical thinking in Western Europe from the twelfth century onwards. Cathedral schools classify the process under practical philosophy, which, in turn, categorizes literature attributed to the *auctores*. The term *ratio practica* enters academic discussions in the beginning of the thirteenth century. Prior to that time, scholars treated deliberation leading to action under the category of *prudentia* with which it comes to be equated: *prudentia enim est ratio practica*[1]. Although addressed in teaching, the most salient representation of practical reasoning as critical thinking occurs in secular romances because they depict ethical conflict. In crises, fictional speakers need to articulate options and to figure out the best thing to do.

Cicero (106-43 BCE) supplies the Middle Ages with a pertinent moral vocabulary. Deriving *prudentia* from the Greek *phronasin,* he defines it as *the practical knowledge of things to be sought after and of things to be avoided*[2]. In Medieval teaching, *prudentia* moves from Cicero's legal contexts, concerned less with knowing than with doing, to focus on knowing about doing. Like Roman rhetoric, the vocabulary of practical philosophy will be sustained but substance altered by the institutional contexts in which it survives. In effect, scholastic discourses increasingly emphasize cognition as the basis of human behavior. Whereas Augustine (354-430), for example, Christianized *prudentia* when he aligned it with love of God, Thomas Aquinas (1225-74), under the influence of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, elaborates: *Prudentia* becomes *right reason about*

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[1] Albertus Magnus, *Summa de bono*, qtd. in O.D. Lottin, *Psychologie et Morale aux XIIe et XIIIe Siècles*, v. I-VI, J. Duculot, Gembloux (Belgique) l957[2], 3, p. 266: *Prudentia enim est ratio practica, eosdem habens actus, eo quod ratio actum dat, prudentia autem informat eum per rationes iuris et expedientis et honesti*. For an outline of the development of *prudentia*, see O.D. Lottin, *Psychologie et Morale ...* cit., 3, pp. 255-280.

[2] Cicero, *De officiis*, *Loeb* 21, Harvard UP, Cambridge 1968, 1.153: *quae est rerum expetendarum fugiendarumque scientia*.

things to be done[3]. A Paris student's notes suggest the significance of practical or moral philosophy in that the space devoted to the topic is *second only to logic*[4]. However imprecise as a discipline, scholastic consideration of it moves from Cicero's *scientia* which implies a general, experiential knowledge to Thomas Aquinas's *ratio* which implies a studied, formalistic logic.

The definition of practical philosophy dependent on knowing what is to be sought and what is to be avoided endures throughout high and late Medieval discussions. Scholastics debate whether the exercise of practical reasoning is either affective or intellective, whether to locate choice in the will or in the reason. Differences arise over the interpretation of its syllogistic components. But the basic definition remains instrumental in Medieval academic introductions known as *accessus ad auctores*[5]. These introductions[6] aim to preserve Classical Latin secular writings by including them under the category of moral philosophy on the basis that literature *treats behavior*[7]. According to Livesey, they typify *scholastic culture* in asserting books as authority and in providing *conventional and uniform way[s]* to analyze texts[8]. But the *accessus* are neither uniform nor universal. As Marjorie Woods notes, they *offer insights – but often*

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[3] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae,* Gen. Ed. Thomas Gilby, 60 vols, Blackfriars and McGraw-Hill, New York 1964-1976, 2a2ae, 47.2.8: *prudentia est recta ratio agibilium.*

[4] C.H. Lohr, *The Medieval Interpretation of Aristotle,* in N. Kretzmann, A. Kenny, J. Pinborg (eds), *Cambridge History of Later Medieval Philosophy,* Cambridge UP, Cambridge 1982, p. 87.

[5] For an overview, see E.A. Quain, *The Medieval Accessus ad auctores,* in "Traditio" 3/1945, pp. 215-264.

[6] See for example type C in R.W. Hunt, *The Introductions to the Arts in the Twelfth Century*, in *Studia Mediaevalia in Honor of Raymond J. Martin*, De Tempel, Belgium 1948, pp. 85-112.

[7] R.B.C. Huygens (ed.), *Accessus ad auctores,* Berchem-Bruxelles, in "Latomus" 15 (1954), pp. 20, 23: *ethice subponitur quia de moribus tractat.*

[8] S.J. Livesey, *Accessus ad Lombardum, the secular and the sacred in medieval commentaries on the Sentences*, in "Recherches de théologie et philosophie médiévales" 72/1 (2005), p.155.

only partial ones – into medieval analytical and critical practice[9].
In his prologue*, Arnulf of Orleans (fl.1156), for example, explains
that Lucan's *Pharsalia/De bello civili* pertains to ethics *not because
[Lucan] gives moral instruction* (*precepta morum*) *but because in
a certain way he encourages us to practice the four virtues*[10]. Un-
like the prescriptions in didactic moral literature, the *Pharsalia/De
bello civili* presents behavioral models: public lessons from which
to cultivate private ethics. According to the *Commentary on the Ae-
neid* attributed to Bernard Silvester (fl. 1156), self-knowledge is the
benefit (*utilitas*) derived from penetrating the veil (*involucrum*) of
classical literature[11].

In effect, the twelfth-century *accessus* evidence an intellectual
development that encourages the practice of practical reasoning
even if not codifying its logical steps. Vernacular secular romance,
however, represents critical thinking resulting from conflicts. Fic-
tional speakers demonstrate their ability to consider options in the
process of making ethical decisions. Their critical thinking occurs
in internal debates asking, *what shall I do?* On the one hand, sec-
ular authors attempt to locate a framework for right action beyond
the confines of academic disciplines and institutional Latin. On the
other hand, the debates complement and elaborate on the *accessus*,
as if understanding their descriptions to be prescriptions needing
representation.

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[9] M.C. Woods, *Access through Accessus,* in A. Butterfield, I. Johnson, A. Krae-
bel (eds.), *Literary Theory and Criticism in the Later Middle Ages,* Cambridge Uni-
versity Press, Cambridge 2023, p. 24, n. 1.

[10] Quoted in A.J. Minnis and A.B. Scott (eds.), *Medieval Literary Theory and
Criticism c. ll00-c. l375: Commentary Tradition,* Clarendon, Oxford 1988, p. 155.

[11] J.W. Jones and E.F. Jones (eds.), *Commentum quod dicitur Bernardi Silves-
tris super sex libros Eneidos Virgilii*, University of Nebraska Press, Lincoln 1977,
p. 3: *Integumentum est genus demonstrationis sub fabulosa narratione veritatis
involvens inellectum, unde etiam dicitur involucrum. Utilitatem vero capit homo
ex hoc opere, scilicet sui cognitionem; homini enim magna est utilitas, ut ait Mac-
robius, se ipsum cognoscere*; see also pp. 14-17. For additional accounts of this
passage, see A.J. Minnis and A.B. Scott (eds.), Medieval Literary ... cit., pp. 152-3,
nn. 157-8.

Depictions of practical reasoning commonly occur in the literary genre of courtly romance depicting *fin'amors*. Examples vary. In *Eliduc* attributed to Marie de France (c. 1160-1215), for instance, Eliduc finds himself caught between his love and duty toward his wife and first lord in his Britain homeland and toward his new love and new lord in Brittany where he is exiled. His Britain lord recalls him and so initiates his conflict. Rather than a choice between moral and immoral behavior, his choices are equally good and bad. Christian ethics and romance ideology share authority and assert conflicting claims. Midway in the narrative, Eliduc reasons about a course of action[12]. He begins with self-blame: *mal ai erré*[13]. His choice of verb deriving from the Latin *errare* suggests his geographical and ethical wandering. Attempting to delineate the issues, Eliduc considers his choices. On the one hand, he fears for his current love's life if he should leave[14]. He had also promised her father to stay a year in Brittany[15]. On the other hand, he acknowledges his previous lord's claim, and for that matter, his wife's claim upon him to return home. In short, his reasoning mimics as it articulates his choices. Duty and desire are not considered to be neat antitheses because he finds duty and desire in each option. He finally decides, *I shall go and speak to the girl [his new love], / reveal my situation to her; / she will tell me her wish/ and I shall do it as far as I can*[16]. Yet despite his conclusion, he goes first to the king to obtain his leave. However

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[12] Marie de France, *Les Lais de Marie de France,* J. Rychner (ed.), *CFMA* 93, Champion, Paris 1966, ll. 585 ff.

[13] *The Lais of Marie de France,* trans. by R. Hanning and J. Ferrante, Labyrinth Press, Durham 1978, l. 585: *I have acted very badly*.

[14] Marie de France, *Les Lais de Marie de France* (ed. J. Rychner) ... cit., ll. 590-91: *Quant si de li m'estuet partir, / Un de nus [deus] estuet murir*; Hanning and Ferrante (trans.) ... cit., ll. 591-593.

[15] Marie de France, *Les Lais de Marie de France* (ed. J. Rychner) ... cit., ll. 612-14: *Querrai cungé devant le jur/ Que mes termes esteit asis/ Kë od lui sereie el païs*; Hanning and Ferrante (trans.), ll. 611-614.

[16] Ivi, Hanning and Ferrante (trans.), ll. 615-18; Rychner (ed.) ... cit., ll. 615-18: *A la pucele irai parler/E tut mun fere mustrer;/Ele me dirat sun voler/E jol ferai a mun poër*.

legally appropriate, his actions emphasize the hierarchy of duty to his lord over that to his love. In a sense, his debate with himself enables his ranking of duties and allows him to do what he thinks right. When he visits the king's daughter to *reveal his situation*, however, he announces his departure but not his marital status. In effect, the narrative formulates a reasoning that successfully resolves Eliduc's conflict regarding his lords, but not regarding his love.

A perceived necessity forces Eliduc to make a choice he does not want to make. However controversial, Abelard's *Ethics or Know Thyself* (c.1130s) sheds some light on such conflicts because he focuses on mental states. For Abelard, internal consent determines sin: *For God thinks not of what is done but in what mind it may be done, and the merit or glory of the doer lies in the intention, not in the deed*[17]. Whereas Augustine had already treated this *disease of the mind* (*aegritudo animi est*) most famously in his *Confessions* (8.9), Abelard tries to account for conflicting intentions, such as the will to love and not to love. Accordingly, sin cannot be located in the will because we sometimes commit sins unwillingly[18]. In other words, necessity causes us to do what we do not *will* to do. Abelard's example entails a person acting out of self-defense: he both wills not to kill and yet kills out of will[19].

Abelard's emphasis on mental states correlates with the representation of practical reasoning in courtly romances. First, he locates conflict not between duty (to have to) and desire (to want to) but between similar needs, mutually exclusive desires. In his consideration of necessity, internal and external compulsions supply equal motivations for action. Secondly, Abelard's focus on intention delineates character based on ethical choices. Courtly romance, in

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[17] D.E. Luscombe (ed.), *Peter Abelard Ethics,* Oxford University Press, Oxford l971: *Non enim quae fiunt, sed quo animo fiant pensat Deus, nec in opere sed in intentione meritum operantis vel laus consistit*, pp. 28-9, pp. 9-11.

[18] Cfr. D.E. Luscombe (ed.), Peter Abelard Ethics ... cit., p. 16: *non numquam inuiti ... peccata comittamus*.

[19] Cfr. *Ibidem*.

turn, frequently emphasizes decision making rather than physical descriptions of fictional speakers. What happens in the plot becomes secondary to what happens in the mind contemplating action and reacting to circumstances.

Chrétien de Troyes (c. 1135-1191), among others, provides a literary example illustrating the narrative privileging of mental processes over plot. In conflict with himself, Lancelot needs to decide what to do in response to a damsel about to be raped. He hears her screams, instead of rushing to rescue her, he takes twenty-nine lines to consider his options. On the one hand, he has *set off in pursuit of nothing less than the queen, Guinevere*[20]. His delay fills him with despair. On the other hand, he *hear[s] this miserable girl constantly begging [him] for help, reminding [him] of [his] promise [to protect her] and reproaching [him] most bitterly.* The situation presents competing choices. Lancelot needs to determine the best action. He wants to rescue the woman, and he wants to rescue the Queen. However ridiculous such a dilemma appears to modern readers, Lancelot's circumstance demands a prudential choice that includes awareness of his assumptions and the possible outcomes of his decision. He needs to consider the damage his delay causes the queen if he rescues this girl. He judges his reputation and identity to be at stake along with the women needing his assistance.

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[20] Chrétien de Troyes, *Le chevalier de la charrette* in *Arthurian Romances,* trans. by W.W. Kibler, Penguin, NY, 2004, p. 221. Chrétien, de Troyes, *Chevalier de la charrette*, K.D. Uitti (ed.), Bordas, Paris 1989, ll. 1109-1137: *Et dit: Dex, que porrai ge feire?/ Meüz sui por si grant afeire/ Con por la reïne Guenievre./ Ne doi mie avoir cuer de lievre/ Quant por li sui an cest queste;/ Se Malvestiez son cuer me preste/ Et je son comandemant faz,/ N'ateindrai pas ce que je chaz;/ Honiz sui se je ci remaing./ Molt me vient or a grant desdaing,/ Quant j'ai parlé del remenoir;/ Molt en ai le cuer triste et noir;/Or an ai honte, or an ai duel/Tel que je morroie mon vuel,/ Quant je ai tant demoré ci./ Ne ja Dex n'ait de moi merci,/ Se jel di mie por orguel,/ Et s'asez mialz morir ne vuel/ A enor que a honte vivre./Se la voie m'estoit delivre,/ Quele enor i avroie gié, Se cil me donoient congié/De passer oltre sanz chalonge?/ Donc i passeroit, sanz mançonge,/ Ausi li pires hom qui vive;/ Et je oi que cest chestive/ Me prie merci molt sovant/ Et si m'apele de covant/ Et molt vilmant le me reproche.*

Cultural and generic conventions circumscribe the representation of critical thinking in the twelfth century. In the thirteenth century, the interchange between secular and scholastic discourse continues. A salient example occurs in Jean de Meun's *Roman de la Rose* (c. 1270-1280). The personified *Raison* cites Cicero as the authority on how to conduct a life[21]. She aims to convey the benefits of natural love. Although undermining the precepts of *fin'amors*, her lecture explicitly places practical philosophy in its context since Jean de Meun completes Guillaume de Lorris's courtly romance (c. 1230). Among the thirteenth-century developments, however, is the translation of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* (c. 1250). It provides scholastics with the formalization of the practical syllogism. Incorporating it into their discussions of practical philosophy, they formulate a logical means to arrive at a decision to act. Reason determines the rightfulness of a particular action, and the syllogism provides a formula.

Despite differences in interpretations, the derivation of the syllogism from Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* standardizes the premises. Accordingly, the major premise consists of a general moral principle. It asserts the agent's goal in terms of a cognitive moral judgment. Albertus Magnus, for example, formulates his syllogism around *Prudentia's* three-fold role and so weaves it throughout each premise[22]. Although following Albertus Magnus's model for the

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[21] Guillaume de Lorris et Jean de Meun, *Le Roman de la Rose,* F. Lecoy (ed.), *CFMA* 92, Champion, Paris 1965, ll.1221 ff. See also ll. 4400, 47l9, 5375, 5387. For ways in which other authors influence and Christianize the *Ciceronian mode*, see J. Fleming, *Reason and the Lover*, Princeton UP, Princeton 1984, p. l88.

[22] See O.D. Lottin, *Psychologie et Morale* ... cit., 3, p. 271 ff. By way of example, ivi, 3, p. 273, n. 1; *S.* f. 102ra: *scilicet in maiori propositione que est scire in uniuersali, ut non esse fornicandum, et dictamen in minori propositione que est scire in particulari, ut huic commisceri est fornicari, et dictamen conclusionis que est scire in agere quando iam scilicet sententiatur de faciendo uel non faciendo.* Cf. O.D. Lottin, *Psychologie et Morale* ... cit., 3, p. 273, n. 2, *S* f.102vb : *Prudentia nunquam fallit in maiori propositione ubi est tota uirtus ipsius, sed in minori et conclusione fallit, ut supradictum est; et hoc non est prudentie secundum quod huismodi, sed conuenit ex defectu materie, immixtione passionum.* O.D. Lottin, *Psy-*

most part, Thomas Aquinas provides a more detailed account than the former. For Thomas, the major premise is *not only of theory but of practice*[23]. His example is *nulli esses malefiendum*[24]. The components of the syllogism, however, undergo conceptual revisions, partially due to the dissolution of the Thomist synthesis (1277). It resulted in the subsequent rejection of *an analogy between God's deeds and His creatures' actions.* Those who saw the dissolution as a destabilization of ethics continue to maintain that God interferes in every good act [25]. Yet following the separation of faith and reason traced at least to Duns Scotus's philosophical position (c. 1266-1308), William of Ockham (c.1287-1347) omits *synteresis,* God-given knowledge, from the practical syllogism and insists on God's absolute autonomy. He replaces *synteresis,* from which the major premise in Thomas's syllogism derives, with experience[26]. Although he does not explicitly exclude faith and scripture, his practical syllogism lacks an ontological foundation[27]. It is severed from

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chologie et Morale ... cit., 3, p. 273, n. 2: *Uniuersalia iuris sunt in natura nostra, in quibus substantialiter est prudentia, et ista semper manent.*

[23] Thomas Aquinas, *ST* 2a2ae, 49.2: *non solum universalia principia speculative, sed etiam practica.*

[24] Thomas Aquinas, *ST* 2a2ae, 49.2; See Vernon J. Bourke, *Ethics.* Macmillan, New York 1951. Among Thomas Aquinas's many summarists, Bourke distinguishes between a *cognitive* and an *operative moral syllogism* (p. 225). The former issues in a moral position, an act of knowing (p. 223). The latter, the topic of this study, may entail a judgment of conscience but specifically issues in *choosing* and *doing* (p. 223).

[25] G. Leff, *Bradwardine and the Pelagians,* Cambridge UP, Cambridge 1957, p. 12, see pp. 8-12.

[26] William of Ockham, 1 *Sent*., prol. q. 10; qtd. in M.G. Baylor, *Action and Person,* E.J. Brill, Leiden 1977, p. 77, n. 21: *Circa primum dico quod intellectus practicus est respectu principiorum practicum et etiam respectu conclusionem practicum. Et ideo intellectus practicus est respectu finis, quando scilicet de aliquo fine iudicatur quod est appetendus vel prosequendus. Et hoc est intelligendum quia est respectu unius complexi quod affirmat aliquem finem esse apetendum et istud est primum principium practicum in operando*. Also see M.G. Baylor, *Action and Person ...* cit., pp. 76 ff. for analysis of syllogism.

[27] M.G. Baylor, *Action and Person ...* cit., pp. 77-8; for Thomas see *ST* 2a2ae

a God-given universal knowledge that manifests in God's created
world (*ordinata*). Although rationality penetrates reality, the addi-
tional precept that God does whatever he likes disables human ver-
ifiability as to right action in God's eyes. The position *free[s] God
from reason and reason from theology*[28]. Ockham's argument issues
in a contingent future and subsequently leads to the epistemological
category of cognitive indeterminacy: the inability to determine an
outcome due to God's absolute freedom, *potentia absoluta*[29]. Yet in
the absence of *synteresis*, the reason, which is God-given, is still
theoretically capable of knowing principles of right action because
they derive from experience and, therefore, are self-evident[30].

... cit., p. 54, n. 26. For the extent of Thomas's influence on late Medieval English
scholasticism, see W. Courtenay, *Schools and Scholars,* Princeton UP, Princeton
1987, pp. 175-182. Although Courtenay does not explicitly address Thomas's mor-
al philosophy, he outlines the theological attitudes adopted by Thomas's followers
in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. His findings suggest a decline of Thom-
ism first at Oxford, and by 1323, also at Paris.

   [28] G. Leff, *Bradwardine and the Pelagians* ... cit. p.132.

   [29] G. Leff, *Bradwardine and the Pelagians* ... cit., p. 130: *Thus, when one
course is as likely for God as another (neutrality), any is possible (possibility),
and there is no means of determining the outcome (indeterminacy.* For a discussion
of Robert Holcot, Thomas Buckingham, and Adam of Woodham's views on the
relationship between divine and created wills, see G. Leff, *Bradwardine and the
Pelagians* ... cit., pp. 2l6-254. In effect, however, they destabilize ethics by further
severing the link between the two wills. According to G. Leff, *Bradwardine and
the Pelagians* ... cit., p. 219: Robert Holcot grants God's will supreme authority
without man's will doing anything (see ivi, p. 219): *no power rests with the created
will at all*. As a result, man cannot know if an act wins merit. Buckingham posits
God's will as *the only law* so that it instills man's free will with the power to choose
without directing the actions (see ivi, pp. 23l, 235). Adam of Woodham contributes
to the destabilization by allowing for *grace and mortal sin to coexist* in man, if not
simultaneously; he disrupts the order between deeds and rewards (see ivi, pp. 246,
244). For the Ockhamites' argument on future contingencies, see T. Reed, *Middle
English Debate Poetry,* University of Missouri Press, Columbia 1990, p. 357.

   [30] William of Ockham, 1 *Sent*. *prol*. q.11; qtd. in M.G. Baylor, *Action and Per-
son* ... cit., p. 81 n. 34: *Respondeo quod sicut in aliis aliqua principia possunt sciri
praeciseper experientiam, et aliqua sunt per se nota, ita in practicis aliquando sunt
principia per se nota, et aliquando tantum nota per experientiam.*

The minor premise follows the major premise and consists of the application of the major premise to particular circumstances. For Albertus Magnus and Thomas Aquinas, it realizes what is appropriate in respect to achieving the general moral principle. What ethical models, in other words, pertain to the major premise vis-à-vis the current situation. The third part of the syllogism, the conclusion, takes the form either of a command or of an action according to Thomas. For William of Ockham, it takes the form of a judgment, because praxis is distinctly an act of the will concerning a dictate of reason[31]. Accordingly, in William of Ockham's conceptualization, practical reason applies to internal as well as external actions[32]. In short, the conclusion prescribes what to do.

In summary, the scholastics aim to provide a formula to fashion a stable morality. The syllogism models practical reasoning and constitutes a kind of critical thinking. Ockham's contribution, however, disables reason from determining whether this action either pleases or displeases God[33]. As a result, the experiential fails to indicate the moral truth of an act at the moment of its enactment[34]. Since people

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[31] Willian of Ockham, 1 *Sent*. prol. q. ll; qtd. in M.G. Baylor, *Action and Person* ... cit., p. 76, n. 19: *Sed finis ultimus scientiae speculativae est veritas, fines autem ultimus scientiae practicae non est veritas sed opus.* Although Ockham argued that the goal of practical knowledge is action, the reason simply puts forth the conclusion in terms of a judgment for the will to put in action.

[32] William of Ockham, 1 *Sent*. prol. q.10; qtd. in M.G. Baylor, *Action and Person* ... cit., p. 77 n. 22: *quia intellectus practicus non solum inquirit quod opus exterius est fugendum, quod prosequendum, sed etiam omnia ista inquirit de operibus interioribus ... monis operatio quae est obiectum notitiae practicae est praxis; sed operationes interiores sunt obiecte notitiae practicae.*

[33] According to T. Reed, *Middle English Debate Poetry* ... cit., p. 356: William of Ockham thought that *when we come to matters of choice, we can never on the basis of the experience that provides our only verifiable knowledge actually judge whether something or someone would be either pleasing or displeasing to God.* According to G. Leff, *Bradwardine and the Pelagians* ... cit., p. 94: In contrast to that perspective are those philosophers such as Bradwardine who bypass reason by making *grace the source of all goodness*; see also pp. l55-6.

[34] As Reed puts it (*Middle English Debate Poetry* ... cit., p. 357): *Theologians like Bradwardine and Wyclif ... were generally appalled by the postulated discon-*

have no effective, rational means of determining the ultimate value of any course of action, their reasoning results in *cognitive indeterminacy* in terms of God's judgment. Ockham's concept affects the meaning of practical reasoning rather than its overall process. But in undermining the certainty of salvational ethics, he articulates the possibility of faulty conclusions despite critical thinking and best intentions.

This sampling of thirteenth-century developments leads into the fourteenth-century and maps onto fictional representation of practical reasoning. According to Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, *writers … are not initiating but continuing and developing the dynamic effects of the co-habitation of thirteenth-century scholastic and vernacular knowledge*[35]. Changes in education, furthermore, increased literacy of all kinds. Whereas the twelfth century offered cathedral schools and monasteries, the fourteenth century extended its centers of learning (e.g.: civic grammar schools, Inns of Court, universities) and their scope (secular curriculum). As a result, England, for example, hosted a more educated population and a less centralized educated than existed in the preceding centuries[36]. The *moneyed bourgeois gained an interest in history and literature* that, in turn, diversified the audience for vernacular narratives[37]. Due to his reputation for philosophical matters, Chaucer (c.1342/3-1400) offers examples of critical thinking reflective of scholastic developments. His work,

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tinuity of abstract and particular knowledge and by the attendant suggestion that God's plan (including moral and ethical imperatives and, consequently, his system of rewards and punishments) was not manifest in experiential reality. Likewise, as Leff puts it (G. Leff, *Bradwardine and the Pelagians* ... cit., p. 154): *Tradition had taught that being was the foundation of any action – agree sequitur esse – but the modern Pelagians saw nothing but the act itself as alone tangible: its value, or the habit from which it derived, was denied any real meaning.*

[35] J. Wogan-Browne, *Scholastic Theory and Vernacular Knowledge*, in Butterfield, Johnson, Kraebel (eds), *Literary Theory and Criticism in the Later Middle Ages,* University of Cambridge Press, Cambridge 2023, pp. 42-61, p. 61.

[36] C. Baswell, *Vergil in Medieval England*, Cambridge UP, Cambridge 1995, p. 137.

[37] *Ibid.*

furthermore, bridges court and householder audiences. Rather than a particular school of thought such as voluntarism or even a specific theological problem such as the perplexity between two evils, he explores the capacity for critical thinking through experiential conflicts, however fictionalized.

Among many Chaucerian examples, the passage in the *Franklin's Tale* known as Dorigen's complaint illustrates practical reasoning. Evoking much literary criticism, the twenty-two *exempla* extending for about one hundred lines and lasting for *a day or tweye* have been noted for their *utter dreariness*[38]. Literary criticism tends to ask of Chaucer the same question that Dorigen, faced with the disappearance of the black rocks, asks of her God: *why han ye wroght this werk unresonable*[39]? Faced with the prospect of making good on her *pley*-ful promise to love Aurelius, she essentially asks *what shall I do*? under the duress of having to make a choice between *deeth or elles dishonour*. The context of practical reasoning contributes to an understanding of her complaint even as it intimates a playful response to scholastic formulations of ethical models.

The virtues Dorigen posits and *amplificatio* of *exempla* roughly follow a syllogistic model. In lines 1360-4, she states her major premise in general moral principles: her dread of shaming her body, of knowing herself false, and of ruining her reputation. In other words, she wishes to uphold the virtues of chastity, fidelity, and honor[40]. Whether these principles issue from a notion of a God-given *synteresis*, as in Thomas Aquinas's syllogism, or from her own reasonable assessment of herself and situation, as in William of Ockham's syllogism, seems less important than that they reflect her

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[38] G. Chaucer, *Franklin's Tale*, in L.D. Benson (ed.), *Riverside Chaucer*, Clarendon, Oxford l988³, ll. 1354-1458; A.T. Lee, *A Woman True and Fair*: *Chaucer's Portrayal of Dorigen in the Franklin's Tale*, in "Chaucer Review" 19/2 (1984), pp. 169-178, p. 174.

[39] G. Chaucer, *Franklin's Tale* ... cit., l. 872.

[40] G. Morgan, *A Defence of Dorigen's Complaint*, in "Medium Aevum" 46 (1977), pp. 77-97, pp. 93-4.

basic assumptions about the kind of person she is as well as the kind of person she thinks she ought to be.

The *exempla* comprise the minor premise. They realize the particular and appropriate things to do in achieving the general moral principles stated in the major premise. Dorigen's *exempla*, then, provide a variety of dramatic situations with the particular means to uphold her respective virtues. Chaucer groups them thematically according to Dorigen's dread of shaming her body in lines 1367-1418, of falseness in lines 1424-41, and of ruining her reputation in lines 1442-56[41]. Her models, however, stem from her knowledge of classical legends as if following Arnulf's twelfth-century advice[42]. In so doing, she also follows the scholastic consideration of memory as necessary for prudential thinking[43]. In Thomas's words: *it is necessary that we base our calculations about the future on the past; memory of the past is therefore necessary to deliberating well about the future*[44]. Dorigen's idea of the past, however, is not rooted in her lived experience. Her models derive from her learning, and they are as excessive as the actions they illustrate. Consequently, she fails to reach a conclusion. Whenever she discovers a course of action, whenever she reaches a judgment, additional examples occur to her:

> *I wol be trewe unto Arveragus,*
> *Or rather sleen myself in som manere,*
> *As dide Demociones doghter deere..*
> *O Cedasus, it is full greet pitee*

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[41] *Ibid.*

[42] For the endurance of teaching Lucan's *Pharsalia/De bello civili*, see J.L. Peterson, *Defining a Textbook: Gloss versus Gloss in a Medieval Schoolbook*, in "Essays in Medieval Studies" 20 (2003), pp.18-30, p. 23.

[43] Thomas Aquinas, *ST* 2a2ae, 49.1: *Unde convenienter memoria ponitur pars prudentiae*. Also because *prudentia applicat universalem cognitionem ad particularia, quorum est sensus*; *unde multa quae pertinent ad partem sensitivam requiruntur ad prudentiam, inter quae est memoria.*

[44] Thomas Aquinas, *ST* 2a2ae, 49.1.3: *ex praeteritis oportet nos quasi argumentum sumere de futuris; et ideo memoria praeteritorum necessaria est ad bene consiliandum de futuris.*

> *That slowe herself for swich manere cas.*
> *To reden how thy doghtren deydfde, allas.*[45]

Perhaps Dorigen is deciding how to commit suicide. Perhaps she is deciding when to commit suicide[46]. In either case, the act of listing militates against her concluding at all: suicide, while expedient, is anything but prudent. In scholastic terms, this conclusion is *formally* good in that Dorigen believes it to be the right thing to do in accordance with her conscience, but it is *materially* bad in that the action would result in irrevocable harm[47].

The scholastics' practical syllogism coincides with Dorigen's critical thinking in that it focuses on issues of forethought and action. Her deliberation under particularized circumstances, however, undermines her practical reasoning as much as it demonstrates it. Dorigen thinks she can do what she is incapable of doing due to the legends she knows. However humorous her continuous listing of *exempla*, Chaucer represents the components of critical thinking only to posit an ethics that destabilizes it. Both she and the twelfth-century Eliduc find themselves in unreasonable situations. He reaches a solution regarding his lords, but no amount of critical thinking solves his conflict between lovers. When he returns home, his wife conveniently solves the problem by joining a nunnery. In contrast to Eliduc, Dorigen seeks to uphold ethical behavior but is unable to find a prudent model. Her reasoning suggests, in turn, a syllogism that results in an indeterminate conclusion. In simple terms,

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[45] G. Chaucer, *Franklin's Tale* ... cit., ll. 424-30.

[46] D. Baker, *A Crux in Chaucer's Franklin's Tale*, in *JEGP* 60 (1961), pp. 56-64, pp. 62-3. Barker argues for a tripartite organization of the *exempla* based on: 1) the maidens who killed themselves before being dishonored (ll. 1367-94); 2) wives who did the same thing (ll. 1395-l408); and 3) wives devoted in loyalty and obedience to their husbands (ll. 1493, 1442-3, 1455-6): pp. 60-l. Accordingly, Dorigen considers when, not whether, to commit suicide as illustrated by the first two groups, and finally decides not to decide, but to leave the decision to her husband as illustrated by the third group.

[47] J. Bourke, *Ethics* ... cit, p. 138; Thomas Aquinas, *ST* 1a2ae, 18.2.3.

she is caught between Christian and pre-Christian/Stoic morals. As
with Eliduc, Dorigen's spouse formulates a response. He selects a
different general moral principle than Dorigen considered. By the
end of the tale, forgiveness overrides Dorigen's classical *exempla*.
Although they demonstrate critical thinking, Dorigen and Eliduc de-
pend on others to solve their respective conflicts.

   Chaucer fashions another example of critical thinking in *Troilus
and Criseyde.* Like Dorigen, Criseyde engages in practical reason-
ing resulting from her vulnerability to the machinations of others.
But her critical thinking entails a meta-discourse of speech that dif-
fers from reflection. When her uncle first reveals Troilus's interest
in her, her thoughts are divided. Her *estat lith in a jupartie* with her
uncle's *lif… in balance*[48]. That is, on the one hand, Troilus's inter-
est in Criseyde threatens her safety. Her precarious social standing
as a widow and as the daughter of a traitor in a community at war
necessitate practical precaution. On the other hand, her refusal to
encourage Troilus threatens his life and that of her uncle. Following
the mandates of practical wisdom, she decides to act on the general
principle of choosing the lesser of the evils. In a verbal response to
her uncle, she resolves to *maken [Troilus] good chere*. At this point
in the narrative, Criseyde's reasoning negotiates between two neces-
sities: maintaining her honor and her uncle's life. But his life hangs
in the balance only because he threatens suicide. He manipulates
her choices, and he calls it necessity. Whether or not she makes this
distinction in hearing his *paynted process,* she evaluates her sourc-
es. Resolving *ful sleighly for to pleie*, she thinks to amend the terms
enough to secure both her honor and her uncle's life. Evasion and
subtlety allow her to gather her thoughts. She commits herself ver-
bally (in dialogue) to performing one action while committing her-
self mentally (in monologue) to finding another. Criseyde cogently
processes the best thing to do in response to momentary demands.

   After her uncle leaves, Criseyde privately debates with herself.

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[48] G. Chaucer, *Troilus* ... cit., 2.424-476.

She reviews her options. Following Ciceronian advice, she begins *in hire thought argue* by considering ... *what to doone best were, and what eschue*[49]. In other words, her inner debate takes Cicero's definition of prudence to be her general moral principle. Divided between encouraging Troilus and refusing him, she presents a myriad of practical considerations divided into two sections. In so doing, she follows the rhetoric of scholastic disputation *in utramque partem*. She lists out the advantages and disadvantages regarding Troilus's pursuit of her.

In the first part of her reasoning, Criseyde catalogs Troilus's virtues, considers his estate and power, exculpates and applauds herself for being the focus of his love[50]. Her review of the situation suggests objectivity. To validate a reasonable assessment of her situation, she recalls proverbial wisdom: Although society forbids drunkenness, for example, it allows occasional drinking. The idea of moderation enables her to consider a Troilus who preserves her honor and reputation if she encourages him. She understands herself to be young, attractive, and unattached. But her reflections are interrupted: *A cloudy thought gan thorugh hire soule pace*. She moves beyond the superficial considerations of a happy scenario that brings no shame to the implications of encouraging a love affair. She asks, *What shal I doon? To what fyn lyve I thus? / Shal I nat love, in cas if that me leste?* Fear then overwhelms her.

In the second part of her reasoning, Criseyde continues to seek a plan of action that mitigates the options her uncle has presented, but she now considers her assumptions and biases[51]. She articulates the negative aspects of an affair. Love, for example, causes women to *wepe and sitte and thinke*. It takes their freedom and replaces it with constraint and pain. In effect, love thwarts women. It causes them to lose their autonomy. Relationships, furthermore, involve responsibility. Given that Troilus is a prince and hero defending Troy,

[49] G. Chaucer, *Troilus* ... cit., 2.696.
[50] Ivi, 2.703-64.
[51] Ivi, 2.771-812.

Criseyde finally realizes that whatever she chooses jeopardizes her safety. Unlike Dorigen, Criseyde depends on a good reputation for survival given the vulnerability of her social position. If the relationship fails, she forfeits all defense.

Criseyde fashions a logical response to the prospect of *fin'amors*. Although the philosophers assume that all men want to do good, Criseyde evidences an indeterminacy as to what constitutes the *good* for her. Not even lesser goods – material wealth, worldly honor, political power, social fame, sensual pleasure – present to her a worthy enough goal for subsequent action. While her thoughts outline the implications of loving Troilus, her language suggests confusion. She establishes a correspondence between loving and doing, which suggests, in turn, that she conflates the expression of love in terms of its activities with the emotion of love in terms of her state of being. Like Lavine in the twelfth-century *Eneas*, Criseyde cloaks the difference between being in love and its activities as if the former were a matter of choice. Unlike Lavine, however, the conflation obfuscates Criseyde's motivation. If anything, her practical concern for safety circumscribes all the advantages she lists regarding the love affair[52]. She has neither the promise of moral satisfaction and happiness nor the security of an afterlife with God.

In summary, although Criseyde's reasoning focuses on choosing the best thing to do, she considers the possibilities to find out where she stands. In philosophical terms, she needs a general moral principle to direct her actions to an end; in literary terms, she needs one overriding reason to unite her divided thoughts. Her practical reasoning ends ambivalently. Between *hope* and *drede*, between hot and cold, she leaves off for *to pleye*[53]. Rather than undermining her critical thinking, her failure to reach a decision to act, however, also depicts her circumstances. As Chaucer's audience knows, the fall of Troy, the narrative's historical context, renders its inhabitants' decisions meaningless.

[52] See ivi, 2.1135-1141 on safety.
[53] Ivi, 2.810-11.

Unlike other Medieval disciplines, such as logic, practical reasoning lacks a single academic authority. In effect, its muddiness opens the door for representations outside of scholastic discussions. As the inner debates from secular romance suggest, however, critical thinking exposes ethical choices in conflict with each other. Opposing duties momentarily confound Lancelot. Unable to figure out which path best preserves her well-being, Criseyde fails to make up her mind. Yet such inner debates indicate reflections inclusive of motivations and choices to determine the best action to perform. Fiction offers a model of deliberation as a form of critical thinking even if undermining its effectiveness.