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Stève Bobillier. *L'Éthique de la Personne: Liberté, Autonomie et Conscience dans la Pensée de Pierre de Jean Olivi*. Paris: Vrin, 2020. Pp. 288. Paper, €30,00.

Peter Olivi (c. 1248–98) was an original and controversial thinker, whose philosophical ideas have aroused increasing interest within the scholarly community during the last decades. Stève Bobillier's *L'Éthique de la Personne* is the first monograph-length study that focuses explicitly on his ethics. Bobillier's central claim is that Olivi approaches ethics from the point of view of an individual person who chooses her actions freely and with full awareness that the choices are up to her. When someone makes a morally wrong choice (e.g. due to *akrasia*), the choice can ultimately be traced back to the agent's free will. To chart the details of this theory, Bobillier analyzes Olivi's conception of the freedom of the will, self-consciousness, the notion of person, voluntary poverty, and the fall of Lucifer as a case study that illuminates human morality. Although many of these topics have been examined in earlier scholarly literature, Bobillier views them from the unifying perspective of Olivi's ethics and contextualizes them within earlier philosophical and theological discussions. This perspective makes the study more than the sum of its parts.

The study consists of five main chapters. Chapter one opens the work with a detailed examination of Olivi's theory of human will and its freedom, self-cognition, and moral conscience. Bobillier explains how Olivi's radical voluntarism is based on a complete autonomy of the will and its ability to choose between alternatives at any given time. He connects this radical freedom with Olivi's theory of self-cognition, and argues that these two are related to conscience, which is an ability to make judgements concerning the moral value of one's own actions. This places the moral agent at the heart of Olivi's ethics.

Chapter two analyzes Olivi's view of the moral agent in more detail by focusing on the notion of a person (*persona*) and its relation to human freedom. Bobillier shows that it brings together various elements from the domain of metaphysics, theology, and jurisprudence, and argues that the most distinctive feature in Olivi's view is that the notion of a person encompasses

two abilities that stem from the reflexivity of the human mind: self-cognition and the freedom of the will. The human mind is aware of itself, of its actions, and of itself as the subject of its actions; and due to its freedom, it is the origin of its actions, and it is aware of being the origin. Thus, Olivi's ethics is based on a notion of a moral agent who is first and foremost an individual person—not in the modern sense of having a unique personality, but in the sense of being a *per se* existing subject who chooses her actions freely. Bobillier claims that this is an important step in the process that gave birth to the modern subject.

After these fundamentals, the chapter three turns to ethics proper. This is the most important and original part of the work, as it develops in detail Bobillier's interpretation that personhood and self-reflexivity are central to Olivi's ethics: humans are autonomous individuals, intimately aware of themselves as moral agents who must judge the moral worth of their choices by themselves. They can reflect their own (past, present, future) actions and know, via universal and innate moral conscience, whether these acts are morally good or evil. This entails that humans have access to the objective normative order, that is, the natural law/the will of God. But how does the knowledge of this normative order come about? Bobillier discusses several prominent candidates (such as *synderesis*, rectitude of the will, and prudence) and suggests that the notion of experiential "taste" (*gustus*)—which Olivi inherits from earlier theological literature—plays a crucial role. It is distinguished from detached theoretical knowledge and it explains the affective and personal appreciation of good actions and the rejection of evil ones. Further, Bobillier argues that this spiritual taste is a natural instinct of conscience that explains the ability to make moral judgements (166–67). However, he also emphasizes that nothing can determine the will in its choice—in the end, we do what we want to do, what pleases us. Virtues are principally in the will, and the indetermination and autonomy of the will explains why we are personally responsible for the choices we make and for the aims we set for ourselves.

Chapter four turns to voluntary poverty, which consists of giving up temporal dominion (*dominium*) over material goods and ultimately over one's own actions and freedom. It is the pinnacle of the moral development of an individual, and it has a pivotal role in Olivi's theory of

virtues, as it leads to other virtues (esp. humility). However, by submitting one's will to the will of God, one paradoxically affirms one's fundamental freedom, as the vow must be continuously renewed. This process of giving up temporal dominion leads to a more complete spiritual dominion and self-control, which Bobillier interprets as being similar to Stoicism in certain respects. In contrast to humility, inordinate self-love and the will to dominate others are the sources of all vices.

Finally, chapter five approaches Olivi's ethics from the perspective of the fall of Lucifer, which Bobillier conceptualizes as a case of pure *akrasia*. By investigating the moral psychology of Lucifer's pride and inordinate self-love, Bobillier reveals yet another layer of Olivi's ethics: besides their perfect knowledge and lack of body, angels are like humans, and the mechanism of sin and vicious choice is the same in both creatures. This entails that *akrasia* is not a matter of losing control over oneself but a manifestation of one's freedom, the freedom of the will to act against the best judgement of reason. The ability to choose evil is thus inherent in the nature of the will itself.

Together these five chapters constitute a remarkable study, and this summary only scratches its surface. My only major criticism is that the study is occasionally a bit thin on the side of references: it would have been beneficial if Bobillier had engaged with existing research more than he does. Overall, the methodological approach is sound, but I could not help wondering if the similarities that Bobillier draws between Olivi and later philosophers (Kant, Locke, Adam Smith) portray him as more modern than he really was—especially as contextual and philosophical differences between Olivi and the later authors are not developed in detail. On the technical side, a minor complaint can be made of the fact that the bibliography omits several studies that are cited in the work (characterizing it as “selective” does not really help). Finally, there is a striking mistake from the part of the publisher: page 186 is absent and page 184 has been printed in its stead. One hopes that nothing of great importance has been lost due to this omission!

In sum, *L'Éthique de la Personne* is a welcome addition to scholarship on Olivi. It is an

ambitious study of an interesting and original ethical theory, which allows a more detailed assessment of Olivi's significance in the history of philosophy. It goes without saying that my brief summary cannot do justice to the complexity and richness of Bobillier's study, which undoubtedly will generate further discussions on the details of Olivi's ethics.

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