

# Rights

## Introduction

Today's human rights movement challenges laws and cultural norms that violate something "right" that belongs to humans by nature—a "natural right."<sup>1</sup>

Bernard Lonergan finds the origin of the idea of natural right in the efforts of ancient Greek philosophers to pinpoint what makes humans so radically different from animals. Because the habits of animals are the same everywhere, their habits arise from their nature. But because human habits differ widely, they seem to arise not from nature but from cultural convention. I say "seem" because these philosophers were more interested in right living than in a uniformity of human habits. The idea of "right" as opposed to "wrong" at the core of human nature provided the universal and permanent element in humans behind the conventions of every culture.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> In 1948, in light of the atrocities that came to light after WWII, the UN adopted the "Universal Declaration of Human Rights" See <https://www.un.org/en/universal-declaration-human-rights/index.html>. In 1976, it adopted the "International Bill of Human Rights," comprising the "Universal Declaration of Human Rights," plus two international treaties. The most illuminating scholarly work for me is Bernard Lonergan's "Natural Right and Historical Mindedness" in Robert M. Doran and John D. Dadosky, eds, *A Third Collection*, in *The Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan*, vol. 16 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1985) 163-176. Also illuminating is Leo Strauss, *Natural Right and History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1950, 1953). Still, Strauss' insights focus on the history and the logical consistency of concepts, without regard for the normative factors in human consciousness, articulated by Lonergan, that underlie all social structures and historical movements. Two other works I found helpful: Mary Ann Glendon, *Rights Talk: The Impoverishment of Political Discourse* (New York The Free Press, 1991) and Brian Tierney, *The Idea of Natural Rights: Studies on Natural Rights, Natural Law, and Church Law: 1150-1625* (Grand Rapids, MI, Eerdmans Publishing Co.: 1997) These authors are less illuminating because they focus on the *language* and *laws* about rights and not on the underlying normative dynamics of human consciousness.

<sup>2</sup> According to Brian Tierney, "Plato and Aristotle saw no need to appeal to a concept of natural rights in formulating their political theories"; and ". . . we still have no adequate account of the origin and early development of the idea." See *The Idea of Natural Rights*, 1, 13. Notwithstanding the absence of adequate historical accounts, we do have clear accounts of the intentions of Plato and Aristotle to clarify what it means to live rightly. We also have Lonergan's account of the natural dynamics of the consciousness of any adult to live rightly. See "Natural Right and Historical Mindedness," 171-172.

Leo Strauss finds a repudiation of the idea of natural right in the declarations of influential German historians in the 19th century. They proposed that all ideas based on what reason presents as universal among humans, including the idea of natural right, are not expressions of universally valid ideas; in reality, they are grounded in the historical experiences and conventions of certain communities at certain times.<sup>3</sup>

## **Natural Right**

Is there such a thing as a natural right? Besides the claims of philosophers, there is evidence in one's consciousness. It will be enlightening first to verify for oneself that "right" is not an abstract idea but one's concrete experience of trying to live rightly on which claims of "natural right" are based.<sup>4</sup>

According to Lonergan, the source of right living is self-transcendence. It is natural for humans of any culture to transcend themselves by being open to making more of themselves and their worlds.

Being open, in turn, requires fundamental conversions of one's intellectual, moral, affective, and psychic horizons. Such conversions include a personal engagement, clarification, repudiation, and commitment to what one means by *knowing*, by *good*, by *love*, and by *remembering*.<sup>5</sup>

An intellectual conversion repudiates the assumption that knowing is like seeing what's out there or feeling what's in here; it grasps

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<sup>3</sup> Thus Strauss: ". . . there cannot be natural right if there are no immutable principles of justice, but history shows that all principles of justice are mutable." And "The conclusion from a variety of notions of right to the nonexistence of natural rights is as old as political philosophy itself." *Natural Right and History*, 9, 10. We might suspect that by "principles of justice" Strauss has in mind formulated principles, not inner norms to be self-transcending. We also might be puzzled by historians who, priding themselves in being attentive, intelligent, reasonable, and responsible, publicly declare that there is no such thing as "natural right."

<sup>4</sup> Here, I follow Lonergan's method of grounding philosophical categories in the data of consciousness.

<sup>5</sup> See Lonergan's "Natural Right and Historical Mindedness" (1977), 173. In the following year, Lonergan credits Robert Doran for drawing his attention to a psychic conversion: See "Reality, Myth, Symbol," in *Philosophical and Theological Papers: 1965-1980*, Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan, vol. 17 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1985), 384-390, at 390. So, besides intellectual, moral, and affective conversions, we recognize also a psychic conversion as essential to being self-transcending.

that knowing is driven by questions and requires sufficient evidence to confirm answers.

A moral conversion repudiates the assumption that *good* is identical to preference; it grasps that our preferences should not determine objective value but that objective value is what should determine our preferences.

An affective conversion repudiates the assumption that *love* is essentially a matter of emotions; it grasps that being in love is a surrender of oneself to find oneself in the higher unity of being in a love that blossoms into love of others—a love that may manifest itself in the family, in friendships, in loyalty to one's country, and in loving and being loved by God.

A psychic conversion repudiates the assumption that "rational animal" adequately defines humans; it recognizes an affective-imaginal realm of the psyche comprising symbols, stories, and hopes that massively dominate our imaginations and are made present to us through our remembering.<sup>6</sup>

Individuals in any culture can verify for themselves that being fully human is to follow inner demands to make more of themselves and their worlds. In many works, Lonergan invites his readers to verify for themselves that they experience inner demands to be self-transcending at five interconnected levels of consciousness: Being attentive, intelligent, reasonable, responsible, and in love.<sup>7</sup> We pay attention to possibilities. We seek to understand what we experience, what we imagine, what we feel, and what others explain to us. We aim to distinguish truth from falsehood. We consider it right to subordinate personal preference to what is truly good. We are drawn to find ourselves by surrendering ourselves to being in love—with family, with friends, with our

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<sup>6</sup> Under a psychic conversion, the term *remembering* may be elevated to a category for the study of human consciousness that may be verified by attending to the affective-imaginal realm of one's psyche. Our self-awareness, our memories of the past and our hopes for the future would mean nothing if we did not remember them. Among Lonergan's foundational categories, *remembering* would be a constitutive element of any person's *central form*. One's memory comprises not only what one can recall but also what one retains about present events and hopes for in the future—a meaning similar to Augustine's *memoria*. The Voegelin scholar, Gary Throne mentions Augustine's *anamnesis* as central to the Anglican view of the Eucharist not as a *transubstantiation* but as a *sacramentum memoria*. (See Gary Throne, "Augustine: Memory as Sacrament at <https://voegelinview.com/augustine-memory-as-sacrament/>.)

<sup>7</sup> For Lonergan's account of self-transcendence, see "self-transcendence" in the index of his *Method in Theology*. See also "authenticity," the term he uses to characterize people who lead their lives by following the five inner demands for being self-transcending.

communities, perhaps with our creator. Even when we are oblivious, obtuse, unreasonable, irresponsible, or hard-hearted, others recognize in us an absence of self-transcendence because our living is manifestly less right than it might be.

Taken together, intellectual, moral, affective, and psychic conversions open a person to historical mindedness. Intellectually one seeks to understand historical movements. Morally one judges their worth. Affectively one regards oneself as a receiver of essentials of wellbeing lived out by forebears and as a contributor to the wellbeing of descendants. In the psyche's affective-imaginal realm, one imagines not only one's self-story but also an entire world drama of which historical events are scenes. Those who also live by religious faith imagine the world drama not as a drama of good and bad luck, not as reason overcoming mindlessness, not as group animosities, not as of a Manichaeian morality play of Good vs. Evil, but of a self-sufficient autonomy being redeemed by the grace of God working in faith-filled believers.

Because we are also social, to live rightly we want the freedom to associate with others, to gather with others in worship, to speak our minds, to learn, to travel, to be compensated for our work. So we speak of "natural rights" of individuals to make demands on society for the means to live rightly. The means include both protections and provisions.

Societies typically protect people's rights through laws against unreasonable invasions of privacy, unreasonable punishment for crimes, and unreasonable bias based on gender, ethnicity, age or religion. Rights to protection are also called "negative rights."

Societies may provide for education, healthcare, material welfare, and safety, where funding for these resources may come from taxes or citizen-funded foundations. Rights to what one's society can provide are also called "positive rights."

A demand on society for the means to live rightly is a moral claim. Natural rights are objective moral expectations. Negatively, it means that no one has a natural right to do wrong; it would be wrong to interfere with anyone else's pursuit of what is essential for him or her to live rightly. Positively, it means that our own inner demands to live in self-transcending ways may require us, when we have the resources, to



provide others what they need to live rightly. Moreover, we can rightly expect that others do the same for us.

The idea of natural right provided the universal and permanent element behind not only the conventions of many cultures but eventually of certain political economies. While the idea of universal and natural rights are evident in the views of Socrates, as recorded in the writings of Plato (d. 347 BCE) and in the views of Aristotle (d. 322 BCE), it wasn't until the 18th century CE that the idea of natural rights became the foundation for large nations based on the modern idea of *democracy*: a political order that recognizes rightful claims of all citizens to political participation and voting, regardless of gender, wealth, or status as slave or free. In monarchies, oligarchies, and dictatorships, it is individual leaders, along with their councils, who make most claims on people. But in democracies, the government is based not on the word of authorities but on laws created by the people. Ideally, such laws should protect the natural claims of citizens to be free to pursue right living.

The idea of natural rights is closely connected to three other key social ideas.

1. *Equality*. The belief that natural rights are universal, makes everyone equal regarding the inner demands to live rightly. This is what the signers of the Declaration of Independence understood by the familiar phrase, "all men are created equal." They meant that every individual has, by nature, a claim on others for the means for him or her to live rightly.<sup>8</sup>
2. *Liberty*. The essentials of wellbeing require that we be free to pursue them without unreasonable impediments and with the support of various social resources.
3. *Social contract*. Individuals agree to support their governments through participation and taxes in return for government actions that organize and regulate laws, a judiciary, the economy, roads/railroads, politics, education, healthcare, technology, and sciences.

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<sup>8</sup> The relevant sentence from the Declaration of Independence runs, "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness." Strauss notes (*Natural Right and History*, p. 2) that "the majority among the learned . . . interpret these principles not as expressions of natural right but as an ideal, if not an ideology or a myth." Strauss may have overstated his case. It seems implausible that the majority of learned people would fail to grasp that the assertion, "all men are created equal," was proposed as something true, and not as an ideal or myth. Moreover, the entire argument of the Declaration is to state political claims based on reality, not ideological or mythological thinking.

US citizens owe thanks to John Locke (d. 1704) for proposing that the purpose of all governments is to assure an active support of its citizens' natural rights. They owe it to Thomas Jefferson (d. 1826) for incorporating Locke's philosophy into the *Declaration of Independence* of the United States (1776) and to the French National Assembly for incorporating it into its *Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen* (1789). This incorporation of "natural rights" into political principles is usually referred to as the "modern" view of rights.

## What Are Some "Natural Rights?"

What are these natural rights—these essentials to living rightly? The lists differ. Below is a list drawn up by Pope John XXIII and published in his 1963 encyclical, *Pacem in Terris*, ("Peace on Earth"). It represents a majority of the rights claims upon society made by people today.<sup>9</sup>

Natural Rights	Practical, Social, & Legal Examples
<b>Bodily</b> Life, bodily integrity	Food, clothing, shelter, rest, healthcare. Security in sickness, frailty.
<b>Political</b> Self-determination	Political participation. Suffrage. Due process.
<b>Movement</b> Travel	Nationality, residence. Migration (internal & external).
<b>Association</b> Social interaction	Assembly, societies, associations

<sup>9</sup> This chart is taken from "Personal, Social and Instrumental Rights: An Interpretation of *Pacem in Terris*." Adapted from Yale Task force on Population Ethics: D. Christiansen, R. Garet, D. Hollenbach and C. Powers, "Moral Claims, Human Rights, and Population Policies," *Theological Studies* 35 (1974) 102. See also the "Universal Declaration of Human Rights" adopted in 1948 by the United Nations. It expresses a commitment to the concepts of dignity, liberty, equality, and brotherhood; it lists rights to life, to freedom of movement, speech, thought, religion, conscience, and to security in cases of disability, motherhood, and childhood; it asserts a duty to society and to uphold the purposes of the defined rights.

<b>Economic</b> Work	Adequate working conditions; fair wage. Organized labor. Own property.
<b>Familial</b> A state of life	Procreate. Start family, Remain single. Cultural support of family life.
<b>Religious</b> Belief	Freedom of religion. Private and public expression of beliefs.
<b>Communication</b> Speech	Freedom of expression. Education, culture. Privacy. Truth in advertising. Being truthfully informed. Protection against false witness and invasion of privacy.

Notice that the first column represents “natural rights” across various dimensions of being human, and that the second column represents *examples* of ways a society protects or provides for these rights. In nearly every other society prior to the 17th century, laws were based on what their leaders thought appropriate, with perhaps some advice from a stable of counselors. Yet even in many societies today, there are no laws for ensuring certain natural rights. Cuba does not protect people’s right to travel. China does not honor people’s right to worship. The United States does not adequately provide resources for people’s right to healthcare.

So, when talking about rights, it is important to distinguish between natural rights and its legal protections and provisions. Do Syrians have a right to travel freely beyond Syria? A natural right, yes; but a legal protection of this natural right, no.

Moreover, we often hear of "legal rights" (or "Constitutional rights"). Ideally, "legal rights" should not only protect and provide; they should also arise from natural rights. However, some claims of "legal rights" have no direct foundation in natural rights. In the US, everyone has legal rights regarding concealed weapons, secret societies, and abortion. But people who are serious about living rightly would rightly consider their circumstances and motives and intended outcomes before assuming that carrying weapons, joining a secret society, or aborting a fetus are consistent with living rightly.

The second column in our list of natural rights gives examples of how some societies protect or provide for these rights. It is not appropriate to claim a "natural right" to *how* these rights are protected and provided for. When people stretch the idea of a natural right to claim a "right" to government subsidies for healthcare or welfare assistance or education, it is not convincing to people who know that there are many ways to honor

a natural right. *How* a society honors natural rights falls under our natural "political right" to self-determination as a society. Should the majority of citizens believe that the best way to meet their shared rights to life and bodily integrity is through government subsidies of healthcare, welfare, and education, they have a political right to demand that their government provide such subsidies.

## Practical Questions

An understanding of natural right casts light on decisions faced by those who demand their rights, those who uphold the rights of animals, and those who appeal to the rights of a fetus.

### Demanding Our Rights

An oppressed group that "demands a right"—to voting, education, healthcare, equal employment opportunity, and so on—risks undermining its own best interests. If I say I *demand* a right, I overlook the fact that I may already have a natural right. Of itself, a natural right cannot be demanded of one's government or society. In many cases, oppressed groups back up their rights-demands by threats of violence, but few governments or societies buckle under such threats. Indeed, many find ways to keep violence-prone groups oppressed precisely out of a fear of hatred and violence.<sup>10</sup>



An alternative, pursued by Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King Jr., and others committed to nonviolent demonstrations, is to appeal to our common human needs for living rightly. Their intention is to "demonstrate" the living humanity of people whose desire to live rightly is blocked by certain laws or customs. It is aimed directly at the inner experiences of a demand to right living that the so-called oppressors share with the oppressed.



In any appeal to authorities to what is necessary for right living, it is legitimate and sometimes necessary to oppose restrictions on the

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<sup>10</sup> The photo is included here under "Fair Use" provisions of US Copyright law: its purpose is educational, and the author seeks no profit from the article.



essentials of right living—for example, by civil disobedience or non-payment of taxes or by non-compliance with workplace policies. On the other hand, right living means living responsibly. Non-compliance with restrictions on right living should be accompanied by taking responsibility to establish the conditions for right living—through voting, teaching, writing, volunteering, and/or active participation in local governments or workplace committees. People who appeal to right living through non-compliance without also actively supporting efforts to create the social conditions for right living violate the responsibility aspect of their natural rights.

Not everyone accepts the idea of natural rights. Many people today speak of “human rights” as referring strictly to what their laws guarantee.<sup>11</sup> Even respected historians write that in 1920 American women “won the right to vote.” But what they won is the nineteenth amendment to the Constitution guaranteeing the free *exercise* of their natural right to vote. This is not just semantics. What counts is whether voting is not simply a feminist agendum but a *human* requirement.

### **Animal Rights**

Recently, people concerned about cruelty to animals and destruction of natural animal habitats voiced their demands in terms of “animal rights.” This strategy of extending human rights to animals introduces some ambiguities. Obviously, rights to worship, to freely speak one's mind, to earn a living, and to participate in government do not apply to animals.

Less obviously, but more basically, the idea of a right is rooted in the views of Socrates, Plato and Aristotle that certain actions are objectively necessary for humans to be free to pursue ways to live rightly. Animals possess no such freedom. They instinctively seek safety and avoid threats, but they do not ask questions; they show no capacity for pondering right and wrong ways to live. It seems right to be concerned about the safety and security of animals, but efforts to protect such animals by appeals to the “rights” of animals are easy to dismiss; the notion of animals having rights is new, confusing, without roots in a freedom to choose between right and wrong ways to live, and inapplicable to bugs, cattle, and fish.

Rather, the wellbeing of animals depends hugely on the freedom of humans to avoid cruel treatment and destruction of habitats. Efforts

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<sup>11</sup> The philosophical/legal theory of “logical positivism” held that the only real things are those which are either empirically provable (we can test them) or logically necessary ( $1+1=2$ ). All religious, superstitious, and supernatural statements are meaningless because their truth cannot be established by appeal to evidence. This philosophy was propagated by a group called the Vienna Circle and later came to be associated with A. J. Ayer and the theory of Emotivism.

would be more effective if, instead of speaking of animal rights, appeals were made directly to the principle behind the idea of human rights, namely, that humans naturally desire to live rightly. Such a strategy confronts the perpetrators more directly:

Does your natural desire for a healthy and beautiful human habitat include the habitats of animals and the beauties of nature? Is senseless cruelty to animals allowable for anyone's right living? When destruction of animal habitats seems inevitable for "progress," does this "progress" advance people's need to live rightly, or only pad the incomes property owners? Are your attitudes toward animals and their habitats part of the role model for right living you want to be for your children?

### **Fetal Rights**

A more complex issue related to natural rights is abortion. Because it is complex, and moral arguments seem unable to converge on consensus, it seem likely that abortions will continue. They may not even dwindle. To move the discussion forward, it will help to clarify one significant moral aspect of the issue, namely, how natural rights affect decisions regarding abortions.

Abortion is complex because those opposed speak of the rights of the fetus and those who allow it speak of the rights of the mother. Arguments on both sides justify their positions by claims to live rightly. It may be objected that a fetus has yet to experience inner demands to live rightly. But everyone recognizes that parents have an obligation to protect and provide for the wellbeing of children. Expectant parents aiming to live rightly would base an abortion decision on their inner demand not only to live rightly but also to protect the awesome capacity for right living inherent in the life they created.

Those who uphold natural rights support the rights of individuals to make demands on society for the means to live rightly, where the means include protections and provisions. Protections would support the freedom of individuals to decide about an abortion. Provisions would include education on the process of conception, on adoption options, and on child-welfare financial support. Also needed are dialog forums for would-be parents to help one another to see a way to right living through the fog of traditions, moral standards, special circumstances, and personal motives.

Another reason the abortion issue is complex is that *moral certitude* is not always possible, particularly in situations not envisioned in the formulations of traditional moral standards. Despite the highly confident language of some on both sides, one cannot always say for sure that in a certain *type* of situation, doing X is always right and Y is always wrong.

There are countless situations in which the parties struggle with unanswerable questions and whose sole certainty is that they are responsible for making a decision. Moreover, the absence of moral certitude is often evident not only in the decisions made by expectant parents but also in public statements made by religious authorities and ethicists.

In the absence of moral certitude, what is possible is what we might call *moral conviction*. Moral conviction is based on the best available resources—a combination of one's tradition, learning, wisdom, and character.<sup>12</sup>

The abortion issue is only one manifestation of a more fundamental moral problem of knowing what living rightly means in cases of uncertainty. What counts morally are moral character, circumstances, motives, and intended outcomes. But it often happens that one's moral character is not fully mature and that there are circumstances, motives and intended outcomes that are unclear or unknown.<sup>13</sup>

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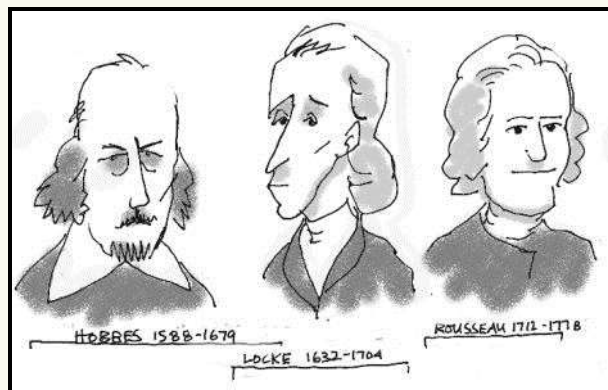
<sup>12</sup> There are many situations where moral certitude based on traditional moral standards is impossible because the situations comprise elements, usually of modern technology or economics, that were not envisioned by those who first formulated the standards. Where situations are not categorizable under traditional moral standards, ethicists speak of "uncategorizable" situations and of the corresponding virtue of *epikeia* (Greek: *epikeia* = uncategorizable). This is the virtue by which persons who, because they understand the reasons behind certain standards, rely on their practical wisdom and prudence to apply them to circumstances not originally envisioned by the formulators of the standard. This allows breaking the letter of the law for the sake of its purpose—usually some higher or more universal good. It also implies a duty on ethicists (and historians, sociologists, and psychologists) to separate definitions of situations from value judgments on their moral status. Thomas Aquinas provides the classic treatment of *epikeia* in his *Summa Theologica*. See <http://www.newadvent.org/summa/3120.htm>.

<sup>13</sup> Commonly mentioned factors related to abortion include how far into a pregnancy a prospective abortion would occur, the financial burdens of raising another child, a personal preference for spending on material goods, genetic disorders in a parent, rape/incest, a neurotic fear of parenthood, and a lack of maturity for making responsible decisions. Another commonly mentioned factor is the "morning after" pill in cases of rape, incest, alcoholic stupor, and passionate foolishness. The pill is designed to prevent ovulation, conception, and implantation. While the first two are contraceptive and not abortive, the third terminates a newly-conceived life. Normally, a woman would not know at the time what the pill is doing. A statement from the Vatican's Pontifical Academy for Life (February 23, 2013) emphasized that preventing implantation is abortifacient. It also allowed that if this pill were taken several days before the moment of ovulation, it would be contraceptive, not abortifacient. (No mention was made in this text about the morality of artificial contraception.) How a woman identifies a "moment of ovulation" was not made clear. See: <https://sspx.org/en/morning-after-pill-abortifacient>

To say "it often happens" is evidence of a feature of cultures everywhere who must continue the work of searching to resolve problems of dysfunctional social institutions. At least we can say this: The scope of this work should take into account circumstances, motives, and intended outcomes that are unclear or unknown. In any case, as a principle of moral education, it seems objectively better to at least lead students to base their moral convictions not on self-interest but on self-transcendence.

## **Self-Interest or Self-Transcendence?**

The view that self-transcendence has a priority over self-interest opposes the view of the founders of modern liberalism (in particular, Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, and Jean-Jacques Rousseau).



They based their ideas of social contract on an assumption that individuals gather into a society in order to pursue their self-interests more effectively. They reasoned that when people agree to honor one another's right to the free pursuit of their self-interest, and, by social contract, as it were, to accept laws that restrict this freedom only where it conflicts with the freedom of others, then wars are avoided and peace reigns.

As everyone knows, this doesn't work well. Avoidance of war is certainly a value, but by itself is insufficient for right living. Moreover, the meaning of "self-interest" can be understood both narrowly and widely.

At the narrow end, some people are interested only in what benefits themselves.

Next are people *also* interested in the companionship and collaboration of others in their particular society.

Next are people *also* interested in the kind of companionship and collaboration that promote what is truly better for everyone, regardless of what society they belong to.

At the widest end, there are people *also* interested in being self-transcending—people who allow intelligence, reason, and love to move them to see values beyond mere logic, to care for others, to persevere in hope when times are tough, and to count on being in love for the wisdom, the courage, the companionship, and the material support for living rightly. Being in love opens one to the enchanting mystery of seemingly ordinary human life and to a readiness to respond to love-driven inspirations in their hearts. This widest perspective is evident in those who welcome God as giving them a share in the innermost divine life of love. It is evident even in people who take their stand on being "spiritual but not religious."

Those with narrow views of self-interest find support among philosophers who hold that all moral standards are nothing but social conventions, products of a society's history, expressions of mere preferences, and that the notion of natural rights has no place in historical mindedness.

Yet history itself is experimental. There is such a thing as a collective responsibility. Successes and failures of certain nations and cultures become part of a collective memory and a collective conscience that applauds the successes and deplors the failures.<sup>14</sup> A society of people whose interests are wide will be more harmonious, productive, historical-minded, and happy than a society stratified by the successes of individuals in benefitting only themselves or their groups.

Lonergan takes the widest view. He conceives historical mindedness as more than an awareness that history is a mash-up of good and bad. It is a grasp that the intelligibility of history is a dialectic of the presence and absence of self-transcendence, and that self-transcendence is both the foundation and the goal of all claims of natural rights.<sup>15</sup> In this perspective, the self-interest of people with wide horizons is not an interest *in* self but an interest *of* self in what transcends the self:

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<sup>14</sup> Lonergan: "people are responsible individually for the lives they lead and collectively for the world in which they live them." See "Natural Right and Historical Mindedness," 163, 170. On an earlier mention of "collective conscience," see his "Finality, Love, Marriage" in *Collection*, 17-52, at 35.

<sup>15</sup> Lonergan challenges the assumption that moral norms are entirely a matter of preference or social convention. He finds in history itself the evidence of the self-transcending nature of human consciousness and common moral norms in worldwide condemnation of violations of natural rights. (There comes to mind our natural horror regarding terrorism, murder, sexual abuse, and any imprisonment, exile, or extermination of people based on mental handicaps, ethnicity, religion, or race.) See "Natural Right and Historical Mindedness," in Frederick, Crowe, ed., *A Third Collection* (New York: Paulist Press, 1985) 169-183; or in Robert M. Doran and John D. Dadosky, eds., *A Third Collection*, vol. 16 of the *Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan* (1988), 16, 163-176.

intellectual objectivity, collaboration with others, the true wellbeing of others, personal openness to all things good, and allowing love to take the lead in their hearts. As a principle of living, such love may be a love of friends and family. It may be a love of one's country. It may be a love of God, who creates the entire universe and each person in it.<sup>16</sup> According to the Gospel message, the love of God empowers people to welcome into their hearts God's innermost, loving Spirit: a love that not only is creative but also is a share in God's own love for one's neighbor. The same love of God may also recognize and welcome God's innermost Word who, in Jesus of Nazareth, has lived among us, was humbled unto death, and was raised from death to work through us God's deeds of love in our history.

Western societies have been widely criticized for focusing on the good of the individual rather than on common and higher goods.<sup>17</sup> Much of the blame for individualism has been laid on the priority of self-interest proposed by the founders of liberal democracies. We have been called the "Me" generation. We might add here that we are also a "We" generation: "we Americans," "we Chinese," "we Muslims," and so on. It is not ordinary egotism but rather a group egotism—what we might call a "groupism."<sup>18</sup>

To move beyond individualism and groupism, it seems better to speak not of self-interest but of self-transcendence as *the most fundamental natural right*. If a right is conceived as a demand on society for the means to live rightly, living rightly requires respecting the essentials of right living not only for oneself but also for one another. That is, an essential of right living is the self-transcendence by which we move out of mere self-concern and toward an openness that considers all aspects of anyone's experience, that seeks to correctly understand anyone's situation before passing moral judgments, that aims to do not merely what we prefer but what is objectively better, that continually nourishes the intellectual, moral, affective, and psychic resources in oneself and others, and that

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<sup>16</sup> For Lonergan's focused account of authenticity and being in love, see "The Response of the Jesuit as Priest and Apostle in the Modern World," *A Second Collection*, vol. 13 of *The Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988), 140-158, at 140-148.

<sup>17</sup> For a thorough analysis of individualism in American life, see Robert Bellah, *et al.*, *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life* (New York: Harper & Row/Perennial Library, 1985).

<sup>18</sup> The notion of "groupism" comes from Lonergan's recognition of a bias to which all humans are prone, namely, a bias for the benefit one's own group and against the benefits of other groups. See his references to "group egoism" in "Healing and Creating in History," and "Mission and the Spirit," in *A Third Collection*, vol. 16 of *The Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan* (2017) 21-33, 94-103. Originally published by Paulist Press (New York, 1985).

welcomes being in love as the richest source of living rightly. Such being in love is a principle of movements in oneself to be self-transcending. It is to be "lifted above ourselves and carried along as parts within an ever more intimate yet ever more liberating dynamic whole."<sup>19</sup> It may be a love not only for one another but also with one's creator, that "strangest of all lovers," proclaimed in the Gospel message.<sup>20</sup>



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<sup>19</sup> Our natural capacity to be attentive, intelligent, reasonable, and responsible and in love is made actual when we fall in love. Lonergan also finds fault in debates focused on conflicts of statements. Instead, he promotes dialogs in which there occurs encounters of persons, each of whom manifests a "natural propensity to seek understanding, to judge reasonably, to evaluate fairly, to be open to friendship." See Lonergan's "Natural Right and Historical Mindedness," 169, 176. See also, his *Method in Theology* (New York: Herder & Herder 1972) 252-53. On this issue, it would seem beneficial to individuals and societies alike to end the practice and the teaching of debating, and to promote the practice and skills of a dialog where one's horizons on learning, morality, affectivity, and memories/hopes are brought to light through the tactic of encouraging one another to amplify one's views. See my *Doing Better: The Next Revolution in Ethics* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2010) 194-203.

<sup>20</sup> "God is the strangest of all lovers" is the opening line in Jessica Power's poem, "God is a Strange Lover." See *Selected Poetry of Jessica Powers* (Washington DC: ICS Publications, 1989, 1999) 16.