THE OPEN ETHICIST

Tad Dunne

This article is a somewhat modified version of my original chapter 7 in *Doing Better: The Next Revolution in Ethics* (Marquette University, 2010).[1]

Openness of Spirit

According to the philosopher-theologian, Bernard Lonergan, being open to transcending ourselves is a basic condition for making life more livable. This is not just an openness to the idea of transcendence, but the courageous habit of letting our thoughts and hopes be lifted always beyond present knowledge, beyond present values, and beyond present company to accompany anyone in the human struggle. This openness does not lift us out of our humanity; it lifts our humanity from mere inner demands to survive and toward the higher demands to make sense out of life, to sift truth from error, and to share ourselves in a deeper love—for one another and for the divine giver of ourselves to ourselves. In what follows, I will refer to these inner demands to be more fully open as *exigences*.

Our openness is infinite. No truth is excluded, no value is excluded, no personal engagement is excluded. It has the power to bring any authentic person to take seriously the religious question what sort of being might be responsible for making us like this and why. And the exigence for openness is ongoing. Should the day ever come when we eliminate slavery across the globe, we will not have eliminated the possibility of slavery because egotism, its main driver, is a permanent alternative to authenticity. The same may be said for wars, driven mainly by a bias for one's own group, and for violence, driven mainly by commonsensism, and for every kind of irrational willfulness that religions call sin.

When we speak of *ethicists,* we usually imagine people who are known as such—people who have explored the history and discipline we know as

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[1] Earlier chapters in *Doing Better* explored how all public moral norms arise from individual norms natural to human consciousness. Exercises were provided for noting how these norms are inherent in being attentive, intelligent, reasonable, responsible, and in love. An account was then given on how these inner norms can be wounded and then how they can be healed. This raised the question of chapter 7, "The Open Ethicist,"— how we ethicists can be fully open to learning what is truly better, to make better choices, and to love in ever better ways.

ethics. But many other people have researched the history of moral issues and reflected seriously on how we make moral judgments. So here, by *ethicist,* I will mean anyone concerned not just about moral behavior but particularly about moral standards. To speak of their "openness," I have in mind practically anyone who feels impelled by normative drives in their consciousness to recognize what they ought to do in actual situations. Unfortunately, we are not fully open to doing better. And when we are closed in ways we do not recognize, we will disagree on methods and promote principles and policies at odds with one another.

Openness

What does it mean, then, for us to be fully open to doing better? It seems to me that there is a third revolution of ethics coming.[2] It will lead us to discover in ourselves an openness surprisingly different than what we may be accustomed to.[3] We usually assume that we are good learners, that we are objective in our evaluations, and that we are open to working with others for the common good. But openness involves something more radical than straightforward expansions of our horizons. It will be an abrupt step upward to investigate the ambiguous, even dysfunctional, workings of anyone's creativity and the healing of its wounds. We will pose new kinds of moral questions— beyond the practical questions about better or worse initiatives. We will ask what happens in us when we take initiatives in the first place: What happens in us when we learn about situations, and what makes our learning valid? What happens in us when we make choices, and what makes

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[2] A first revolution was an achievement of the classical Greek philosophers, Plato and Aristotle. It emerged when people moved beyond the preferences of individuals and groups and sought to establish universal moral standards—moral criteria that apply to people of any culture in any era, simply because they are human. A second revolution was an achievement of 18-19-century German and English historians and philosophers. It emerged when people realized that moral principles are essentially history lessons. That is, all the moral principles we know about are not abstract Ideals coming down from the heavens. They are lessons about morality that our forbears learned through first-hand experience and wanted to pass on these lessons to their progeny. Yet, because history is still unfolding, people realized that moral principles are themselves provisional. So a third revolution is now underway among ethicists who study the methods by which anyone establishes or criticizes or abandons any moral standard.

[3] *Openness.* Material on openness in a religious context may be found in Lonergan's "Openness and Religious Experience" in *Collection* (198-201). I use the term to refer also to the fuller context of intellectual, moral, and affective self-transcendence. Material on this fuller context may be found under the terms *horizon* and *conversion* (in the following note).

our choices valid? What happens in us when we love, and what additional perspective on ethics does our neighborly and religious loving give? In short, the new openness will open onto questions in the realm of method.

Conversion and Horizon

This openness [4] sets us on a long and arduous journey. Long, because issues of method underlie all major moral dilemmas in every imaginable field of human endeavor. Arduous, because coming to grips with what we do when we learn, choose, and love requires conducting inner experiments and exposing our findings to the scrutiny of others. To envision how this radical new openness to method might generally occur, it will help to distinguish between an initial breakthrough and the subsequent working out of the basic models of ethics that are implied by the breakthrough. We will call the breakthrough a "conversion" and the resulting developments "expansions."

Conversions are highly personal events. They involve a commitment to authenticity in the intellectual, moral, and affective dimensions of our lives. Expansions build on conversions, first in our personal lives as we change how we learn, choose, and love. But the exigence for authenticity also drives us as ethicists to expand beyond our practical decisions into the philosophical discipline of ethics that shapes such decisions.

A conversion is not necessarily sudden. The impression of suddenness may stem from a leap from a partial openness to the full and unconditional openness that colors absolutely everything a person will ever know and value. This is why conversion is often described as a breakthrough. The impression of suddenness may also be reinforced by the vivid reports of some people of their first glimpse into the totality of life and the corresponding inner demands for total openness. But for our purposes, by conversion we will mean a new way of asking questions grounded in a person's actual openness. Our definition specifies nothing about how gradually or suddenly this horizon may open up to a person.

To talk about the new openness of spirit on which an effective ethics can be built, I have been using the term, *horizon.* It suggests a person's *outlook, viewpoint, perspective,* and *world.* But all these terms can be misleading insofar as they depict a person *looking* at something. And knowing is quite unlike looking. Knowing is a matter of asking and answering questions,

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[4] *Horizon and conversion.* See "Horizons" and "Conversions and Breakdowns," ch. 10, secs. 1-2 in *Method in Theology* (235-44)*.*

which has no similarity to opening our eyes and seeing what is out there. So we need to give a technical definition to *horizon* in order to avoid the more commonsense use of horizon to mean "as far as the eye can see." So: *A horizon is the set of answers and questions a person cares about.*

My horizon covers everything I already know—the set of answers I consider reliable because I learned them myself or because they were reached by sources I trust. It also covers everything I do not yet know, but know enough to ask questions about. And I realize that there remains an *unknown* unknown area where I lack both the answers and the questions, but retain an openness to being bothered by experiences that arouse in me a wonderment that can lead to questions and then answers.

My horizon may be closed. This can happen in many ways—incomplete development, a distorted heritage, personal biases, and personal willfulness. When I shove certain questions out of mind, I shut out the realities these questions might reveal; I repress inspirations that might create something better; I chill my heart when love invites. Or my horizon may be open. I can be open to learning about whatever is real, open to creating the better, and open to engaging the mysteries of love, life, death, and ultimate meaning. So when we say that people's outlook, or viewpoint, or perspective, or mindset, is "closed," our evidence is precisely that they impose some restrictions on the questions they will consider. Their world is closed, where "world" means their horizon—the set of questions and answers they care about.

A conversion is a liberation from a closed to an open horizon. There are three kinds of conversion to consider here. Under an intellectual conversion we learn what we do when we learn, with the result that our horizon is open to learning anything. Under a moral conversion we choose a new basis for choosing, with the result that our horizon is open to choosing whatever is really better. Under an affective conversion [5] we let love take the lead in our consciousness, with the result that our horizon is effectively open to loving ourselves, one another, and transcendent reality.

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[5] Religious/affective conversion. Lonergan generally uses *religious* conversion to discuss theological issues and *affective* conversion to discuss philosophical issues. While religious conversion has the divine as an explicit reality, an affective conversion opens onto the divine by recognizing at least the question of God and includes the love of human friendships and loyalties. For religious conversion, see "Conversions and Breakdowns," ch. 10, sec. 2 in Method in Theology (237-44). For affective conversion, see "The Dialectic of History," sec. 3 of "Natural Right and Historical Mindedness" in *A Third Collection* (176-82). For the present discussion of ethics and morality I use the term affective conversion to engage ethicists of any or no explicit religious commitments.

These conversions are not simple additions of further knowledge, better choices, and more love. They are radical changes in what a person means by *knowledge*, *better*, and *love*. Everything he or she knows, values, and loves changes because the originating questions that gave rise to it all become clarified. Just as man cured of lifelong blindness will have a new meaning of "seeing" that changes the meaning of everything "seen," so anyone undergoing these conversions will have a new meaning of "world" because his or her knowing, doing better, and loving are new. The new horizons do not abandon the old; they incorporate the old within more comprehensive perspectives. So, to understand how these conversions relate to ethics, we need to connect them to the actual experiences of ethicists.

Learning about Learning

What we call "moral reflection" involves first learning about the situations that will require moral deliberation. We want to know what is going on before we leap into action. No doubt, different people learn different things about the same situation because they bring different concerns. When your learning nicely dovetails with mine, it is easier to talk about what we should do. But often enough people with the same concerns about the same situation hold opposing views on what that situation really is. In courtrooms, the clear testimony of an eyewitness is viewed one way by the defense and another by the prosecution.

We reconcile some of these differences by learning from each other: someone calls our attention to things we overlooked; someone raises a question that did not occur to us. But what happens when we do not agree on what "learn" means? This is not a preposterous question. People learning about the same situation can assume very different meanings of "learn." All parties may feel confident that they learned what they wanted to learn and still be baffled about why others do not agree. While they may be dedicated to learning ever more about life, they can overlook learning about learning itself. So the horizons of what different parties might learn are not the same horizons.

Most of what we know, of course, comes through believing others. But *whom* we will believe is a matter of choice, which we will discuss further

down. For the present, we will focus on first-hand learning, whether our own or in the original learners whose word we believe.[6]

Among the many different assumptions about learning available to the human mind, four in particular stand out. A *naïve realist* assumption holds that learning relies on *sights, sounds*, and *feelings* to reveal what is really out there. A *conceptualist* assumption assumes that learning requires an intellectual commitment to developing *concepts* that correspond to reality. An *uncritical historicist* assumption regards learning as exploring the *history* of situations as sufficient for understanding human motives and achievements. A *critical realist* assumption regards learning as resulting from an abiding attentiveness to all these issues, but with an explicit focus on the *different kinds of questions* that lead to learning and the different kinds of *bias* that distort learning.

Four Views on Learning

Here, I will describe four psychologists, each one rather overdrawn to represent each of these four assumptions about what learning is. I invite you to consider not only *what* they each learn about their clients, but, more to our point, how their assumptions about learning deeply affect what they are able to learn.

Eve: Naïve Realist

Eve listens to her clients with a deep and obvious compassion. She helps them express their feelings about the people and the situations that trouble them. She believes that psychic health comes only by looking very hard at real, concrete situations, and letting one's feelings flow freely. But unfortunately for her clients, Eve has little understanding of such concepts as repression, transference, and reaction formation, and how these can play shell games with the original objects of their feelings. Her clients feel refreshed, having unloaded some emotional baggage for an hour, but the feelings they express will soon enough attach themselves to some other object whose connection to the originating trauma continues to escape notice.

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[6] Most of what we know, of course, comes through believing others. But *whom* we will believe is a matter of choice. This discussion appears in the later section, "Choosing How We Choose."

Conrad: Conceptualist

Conrad takes seriously every statement his clients make. He expects that all their statements should fit into one of the basic conceptual schemes that he learned in graduate school. Whether or not he admits it to himself, he is committed to the idea that human behavior is always an instance of a concept. "This is a case of obsession." Or, "She has a narcissist personality." He works hard at mastering his craft, but he envisions his mastery as learning all the concepts that apply to the psyche. His clients come away with a name for their problem and some understanding of how the dynamics of the named problem works. But they have yet to verify that concepts such as "obsession" or "narcissist" adequately explain how their personal troubles fit into their life histories.

Narella: Uncritical Historicist

Narella is aware of history. Besides wondering what is going on currently in her clients, she knows that every problem has a past, and it is in this history that she expects to find the pressures, assumptions, expectations, and traditions that shape her clients' mindsets. For analysis, she relies on classical psychoanalysis to uncover formative events in their upbringing, on good fiction and drama to understand how the twists of time affect the heart, and on her knowledge of cultural history to understand their particular ethnic, gender, and religious priorities. For therapy, she leads her clients not only to understand how past traumas led to their present problems, but also to exercise their self-determination by taking a stand on the values they intend to live out in the future. She supports their interpretations of their problems and the values inherent in their choices for change. She avoids injecting her own opinion, even when she thinks their views may be short-sighted. By keeping her criticism of others to herself, she conveys to her clients the idea that the validity of anyone's moral commitments lies in the conviction of the person who holds them; they cannot be fairly criticized by the standards of others.[7]

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[7] Narella also represents the view that Lonergan names "relativism." While there are many brands of relativism, hers stems from an awareness of human historicity but in isolation from the epistemological question of what constitutes objectivity and other human studies regarding human purposes, meanings, and hopes. I have called her assumption "uncritical historicism" because she withholds passing value judgments on her clients.

Abe: Critical Realist

Abe seems unengaged at first. This is because he does not take his clients' statements as true. He takes them as just evidence. He plays with mental images of the evidence until he experiences an insight into possible connections among the various assertions and behaviors that trouble his clients, and he delicately leads them to the same insight. His explanations usually include the possibility that his clients are faking emotions, shading the truth, or dodging sensitive issues. Should contrary evidence appear, they both reconsider the evidence, looking for a better explanation. Abe brings a host of psychological concepts to bear—suppression, denial, paranoia, and so on—but he relies on these concepts only insofar as they help him understand the behaviors and verbal evidence that his clients present. Dedicated to getting insights, he avoids emotion-laden descriptions of his clients' problems, just as he delays mentioning any technical concepts and summary analyses lest these displace the essential need in his clients to gain their own insights into their puzzling experiences. Like Narella, he also relies on what he has learned about people from reading history and fiction, particularly the many ways that minds can be narrow and hearts can be bitter. But unlike Narella, he does not rest with making judgments of fact that these are the interpretations and priorities of this or that client. He is also morally critical. He flushes out their inconsistent values, aiming to help them discover what parts of their experiences and mindsets are truly better or truly worse.[8]

Differences

Each psychologist has a different view of what it means to learn. None may have spelled it out in a theory of learning, but each stops asking questions at a very different point along the ascent of their learning. Should all four counsel the same client, each may feel confident about what is going on, but each will have learned something very different about this client because each has a different idea of what learning is.

Eve thinks learning is paying close attention to what is out there, or "in here" in the client out there. She takes pride in an objectivity that does not let any word or gesture or tone of voice go unnoticed. She assumes she

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[8] Abe represents the view that Lonergan names "critical realism"—reached by what he names a "generalized empirical method." It is empirical because it is based on verifiable data. It generalizes the focus of modern science on data of sense (what can be seen, heard, touched, etc.) to include the data of consciousness when we imagine, think, evaluate, and love.

learns something about her clients when she can vividly picture their situation and deeply empathize with their feelings. For Eve, *learning is assembling emotionally colored mental images*. To her credit, she is faithful to the normativity of experience. While she is counseling, besides listening to every word, she also notices postures, gestures, silences and voice tones. But she has not clearly discovered for herself the further normativities of understanding, reason, and responsibility. She is intelligent; she does understand things. But she has not noticed the difference in herself between experiences of insight and experiences of vivid images and poignant feelings. She is also reasonable; she reflects on what she understands. But she is oblivious of the fact that she is testing the validity of her understanding against the evidence of her clients' words and behaviors. She considers herself "in touch" with her feelings, but to her, "in touch" means only that she *notices* them. She does not directly reflect on *why* she experiences them, nor does she scrutinize them for their subtle trickeries. She is also responsible; she is committed to caring for others, but not to the extent of a "tough love" that challenges her clients about wishful thinking or hedonistic values. *What she learns is a cluster of symbols*—the look and feel of a client "out there."

Conrad, unlike Eve, is quite aware of the need to understand. He thinks learning is not only paying attention to behaviors, testimonies and feelings but also understanding how everything fits together. He is consciously faithful to the normativity of understanding as well as the normativity of experience. He is dedicated to an objectivity that will not buy any explanation that is not logical, coherent, and comprehensive. He asks himself *why* his clients behave as they do, and *how* their psyches may be distorted. But he expects that everything is a case of something. He has not discovered for himself that the concepts he is familiar with resulted not from yet other concepts but from insights into client experiences that occurred to theorists like Freud and Jung. He thinks of his insights, and everyone else's, as revealing which concepts "apply" in this or that situation. In his view, *learning is correlating concepts related to experience.* Like Eve, he too is reasonable; he reflects on his insights to make sure they are sound, but he is ignorant of what makes an insight sound, having detached them from experience and bottled them up in concepts. So he tests his understanding by examining how coherent the resulting concepts are, which leaves little room for revision by someone with more experience and deeper insight into the lives of a wider variety of clients. He too is responsible, which shows in his readiness to deduce what is right and wrong based on criteria of consistency and coherence. But he has no grasp of inductive methods for sorting out the issues of better and worse that fall outside his purview of logic. Also unlike Eve, he monitors and scrutinizes his own feelings for any

false signals, but he expects that any false signals will be a case of transference, or screening memories, or projection, and so on. *What he learns is a set of concepts that correlate* with his client's behaviors and testimonies, as well as concepts that explain his own feelings.
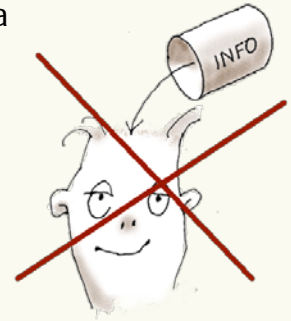
Narella, like Conrad, is keenly aware of the need to understand. But for her, understanding is not restricted to logical deductions and concepts applicable to many clients. She also engages in creative *in*ductions. She expects that every person and every situation is unique, and what makes them unique is an interweaving of unique past circumstances and decisions. So she focuses not on concepts but on context. She asks about concrete events in her clients' pasts to see if she can discern the path leading to their present mindsets. What she expects to learn, and hopes her clients also learn, is a story and, as far as possible, the full story. She goes beyond Conrad's notion of objectivity by encompassing not only what makes logical sense but also what makes historical and dramatic sense. She expects that people will say one thing and do another, will behave inconsistently, and sometimes will knowingly demean themselves. So she questions how her clients interpret their experiences, seeking to understand their understanding by anticipating also their misunderstandings. She lets their contradictions stand as an unprecedented drama, which, like the great dramas of theater, intertwine insights with oversights. For Narella, *learning is making judgments of fact about what people actually believe and honor.* While she relies on her understanding to entertain various explanations, she is mainly after a reasoned judgment of what her clients' beliefs and values really are. Like Eve, she is quite aware of her own emotions; and like Conrad, she recognizes certain emotional dysfunctions that affect her own behavior. But unlike both, she is also aware of how her past experiences still "live" in her, and how healing will involve weaving the threads of her own past into a more integrated fabric of life in her future. For herself and her clients, *what she learns is a history*.

Abe knows that learning involves not only paying attention to experience, not only understanding experiences, and not only making reasoned judgments of fact about the meanings and values people hold. He also takes a critical stand about which explanations best explain the experiences and which values are actually better than others. He is familiar with the differences between the normativities of experience, of understanding, of reason, and of responsibility. His notion of objectivity combines Eve's

concern about experience, Conrad's concern about concepts, and Narella's concern about understanding how in fact people concretely understand themselves and what their operational priorities really are. But he adds his responsible concern to distinguish between truth and error, between the presence and absence of bias, and between better and worse. Where Narella makes judgments of *fact* about people's mindsets and priorities, Abe goes beyond her historicist assumption by making judgments of *value* about their adequacy. For him learning is not pouring information into a brain. It is *an answer to the questions, What is intelligible and unintelligible, true and false, better and worse here?* Among the many explanations he considers, he includes the possibility that his client may be lying, or clinging to some myth, or behaving in self-defeating ways. He aims to form an opinion for himself that best explains how his clients act against their better interests, and he watches for the opportunity to challenge his clients' attitudes or behaviors. Abe is also critical-minded about his own feelings. Experience has taught him that his feelings come loaded with his own history and give him only some initial indications of better and worse. He has learned to ask himself, "Which feelings can I trust to indicate what the really better may be?" *What he learns are answers to questions about reality.*

Now all four psychologists are more or less guided interiorly by the normative drives on the levels of their experience, understanding, reason and responsibility. But only Abe *knows* that he is. Because he recognizes the differences in his own experience, he more faithfully follows the criteria inherent in each of these drives. He is more acutely aware of how learning works: *Learning is responsibly asking questions and getting answers about experience.* We grow in learning by conscientiously cycling through questions and answers. Our imagination pictures what we only begin to question; insights give us answers that we express in concepts; and judgments issue in a narrative of a key developments, stubborn myths, and regrettable mistakes. But unless our sense of responsibility aims to undo whatever impedes our full openness to reality, values, and love, our learning will be blind to the issues that we are unwilling to tackle. We can suppress the questions. Or if we ask the questions, we can avoid the answers. Any action we take will, by default, be just an exercise of the closed mind and heart.

A Dialectic of Horizons

Now what happens when these worlds meet to discuss the same situation? When egos are at stake, there will be debate, of course. When ethicists are open, there will be a dialog, but dialog still does not mean agreement. Given different views about learning, there will also be a

dialectic of these horizons that involves both teaching and learning.[9] So, to anticipate the issues about learning that collaborating ethicists everywhere face, let us imagine how these four psychologists might work together to resolve a concrete moral problem.

Suppose Eve, Conrad, Narella, and Abe each has a child in the same grade school. And imagine them sitting side by side at a parent-teacher meeting. The principal explains that an eighth grade boy named Raymond was found to have a loaded 38-caliber revolver in his locker. She wants to discuss what to do. During the dialog, they will each learn something. And insofar as each means something quite unique by "learning," listening to one another creates a live dialectic among their respective intellectual horizons regarding learning itself.

We can expect that Eve will find Conrad rather abstract and unsympathetic to Raymond's feelings and that Narella overly complicates things by asking about Raymond's past, his social life, and the priorities of his parents. But she may be taken aback by Abe's caution because she does not understand why Abe feels caution is necessary, since, to her mind, what is out there is plain to see. Still, she recognizes that the others are not stupid or silly or irresponsible or uncaring; she realizes that she *likes* them. So she feels a certain inclination to be open to their views.

Conrad would probably try to lead Eve to recognize the moral principles involved and to see some sense in his conclusions about what ought to be done. He may respect Narella for her awareness of the full context of the situation, but be wary of her suggestions for practical actions he cannot justify in principle. He reads Abe's caution as evidence of possibly significant questions that Abe himself cannot clearly formulate. He feels a tension between his respect for Abe's integrity and his own commitment to logical ideals and consistency.

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[9]   The "dialectic" Lonergan has in mind is the fourth manner by which we gain insight into anything. The first manner Lonergan calls "classical." It works by direct insight, such as Newton's insight into falling bodies. The second manner is statistical. It is by an inverse insight, the realization that some event lack intelligibility that could be identified by a direct insight; but events that are clustered in time and space reveal averages and probabilities that give insight into the cluster. The third manner is genetic. It is by a direct insight into a chain of events driven by a single principle, such as apples come from apple seeds. The fourth manner is "dialectical." It too regards a chain of events, but there is an inverse insight that realizes that there is no single driver but two or more that affect one another. Take a simple case: Jack yells at Jill. Jill is affected; she asks why. Jack is affected; he gives her an explanation. Jill is affected; she considers his explanation and most likely will suggest options. And so forth. At each link in this chain, Jack and Jill are successively changed. To grasp the intelligibility of this encounter, insights are needed into the changing horizons at each exchange.

For her part, Narella would respect the views of both Eve and Conrad, but she would likely press to get all questions out on the table before jumping to conclusions. She is not out to dispute with anyone but rather to widen their perspectives to include what may appear odd or confusing about the past. She would lay out the many historical factors in Raymond's life and perhaps even wonder aloud about assumptions that lie behind the opinions of the parents and teachers in the room. She listens attentively to Abe because he not only gives her credit for her historical perspective; he also expresses his own opinion not as dogma but as honestly inviting the feedback from the group.

Abe understands the minds of the other three. Like Narella, he is quite aware that minds are like clothes: changing them in public can be embarrassing. But where Narella will apparently accept all but the most outrageous views, Abe will not. He will engage the enemy—people's biases, myths, and hardheartedness. But he will do so as strategically as he can, in a sincere effort to enhance their relationship while not compromising his views. So he waits, allowing veiled fears to be revealed, hoping for large gains and settling for the small. His goal is to make a decision based on a collective authenticity that enriches the "we" in the room. Specifically, he wants to expose the myths that may have affected Raymond, his parents, his peers, his teachers, the administration, and, indeed, his three fellow psychologist-parents.

As I say, these four types of learners are caricatures. But because they each align with distinct normative criteria that function in everyone, it should be no surprise that they also align with distinct moral philosophies. Eve's naïve realist instinct about learning is shared with empiricists, materialists, pragmatists, and positivists. Conrad's conceptualism is shared with idealists and linguistic analysts. Narella's uncritical historicism is shared by relativists, postmodernists, and other conventionalists. Abe's is named by Lonergan as *critical realism*, understood as those whose notion of "real" includes the processes of learning which, because they are recognized as normative by nature, but also wounded, give a realism that is also critical.

It is in such live dialectics of horizons that the underlying norms that Abe verified for himself become verified by others as well. As their attention shifts from generalizations to concrete actions, they bring to light the concrete scope of their horizons. As Abe asks and answers questions, others may notice the higher priority he places on inner demands to be fully open over the voices of authority, scripture, abstract universals, and moral sentiments. They attend to how their own degree of openness affects how they envision any problem and any solution. As long as an atmosphere of

mutual respect is maintained, the dialectic of horizons functions as an invitation to fuller openness.

Of course, we—real people—are more or less aware of the distinct yet interlocking ways these normative demands actually work. Learning about learning takes time and persistence. What we learn is based on the particular mix of awareness of these normative drives that we happen to have. And even when our intellectual horizons may fully open on some issues, on other issues we can easily fall back from Abe's horizon into Narella's or Conrad's or Eve's.

Pining for Certitude

Eve, Conrad, Narella and Abe want to learn about Raymond and the gun in his locker. As learners, they listen to one another. But they also talk to one another, so they are teachers too. In this fashion, the learning and teaching move along, not aimlessly and forever, but converging toward an agreement about the nature of this situation.

But how do they know when to *stop* learning and teaching? By what criteria will they conclude, "Well, we seem to know what went on here." To see why this is an important question, think of the many discussions where some people rush too quickly to closure and others drag on the discussion endlessly. Both the rushers and the draggers are unsuccessful in learning because they have only a foggy notion of what makes learning "enough."

Why is this? Interestingly, although the impulse to rush a discussion feels quite different from the impulse to drag it out, both impulses grow from a common root. That root is the false assumption that the goal of learning is certitude. Even when certitude does not seem possible and the need for action is pressing, the rushers and draggers regard this as just an unfortunate compromise without giving up the ideal of certitude.

There is a good reason for this. In learning about any situation, there are two moments, or phases—learning *what* happened and learning *why* it happened. When we ask, *what* happened, we rely on what someone saw, or heard, or smelled, or tasted, or touched. As magicians are well aware, we trust our five senses. We are certain about what happened because we experience it directly, or we believe someone else who experienced it directly. Here is where we usually find certitude—in the experience of learning *what* happened. We have learned a fact.

But when we ask *why* something happened, we do not turn to our five senses to gather more facts. We turn to our intelligence to play with the

facts we already learned so as to understand them. Eve, Conrad, Narella, and Abe play with several different explanations of *why* Raymond had a gun in his locker. As they listen and talk, each might notice facts previously overlooked, and each might raise questions the others had not considered. If they eventually settle on a single explanation, it is because the explanation answered most of their questions about the facts at hand. They think of this explanation as "better than any other," and yet they leave open the possibility of new facts and new questions and, therefore, a better explanation yet.

The ideal here is staying open. Because certitude closes further questions, it is not an appropriate ideal for learning *why* things happen. The problem with the rushers is that they so *enjoy* the feeling of certitude that they ignore new information and new questions. The problem with the draggers is that they so *hope to enjoy* the feeling of certitude that even when they never quite get there, they keep on asking questions that cannot be answered. In both cases, one reason the ideal of certitude resists dethronement is because it promises to relieve the tension of living with unanswered questions. It is the comfort of a mind asleep—embraced by the rushers and longed for by the draggers.

There is a deeper reason why certitude is so alluring, deep enough to evade the notice of many philosophers. The reason is that learning *what* happens seems almost identical to looking. We express our certainty by saying, "I saw it with my own two eyes." Even when we use our imagination to invent something or make a plan, we *picture* this kind of thinking as *picturing.* But this is just an analogy; there is no mental screen and projector in the mind. What we need to do is *understand* this kind of thinking as *understanding.* With learning both *what* happened and *why*, our minds pose questions and test answers. If the principal says she found a loaded 38-caliber revolver in Raymond's locker, one could wonder if it was really Raymond's locker, or if it was loaded with real bullets, or if her account can be trusted. Mental pictures are essential here, but only as the data that our understanding works on. Even learning *what* happened is done by raising relevant questions about data we already pictured, not just by "looking at" the mental pictures.

So the criterion for saying, "Well, we seem to know what went on here," is not some vivid picture, or urgent description by an eyewitness, or a dogmatic pronouncement by some authority. At base, the criterion for the adequacy of this or any other judgment is simply the *absence of relevant*

questions.[10] We grasp that the evidence on hand is sufficient to support a certain or a probable judgment. The validation for concluding *what* happened is the absence of residual questions about the data, their source, their reliability, and so on. Similarly, the validation for concluding *why* something happened is a subjective acceptance of a "better than any other" explanation while remaining open to new data and new questions.

Practically speaking, this means that someone like Abe, who has learned about learning, focuses his attention on the questions that bother him. He is familiar with the feeling of intellectual discomfort. The normativity of understanding disturbs him. He asks himself, "What exactly is *the question* that bothers me?" No doubt, Narella, Conrad, and Eve will learn a thing or two, but odds are that Abe's learning will be far more successful because he focuses his mind quite strictly on questions and answers, relying on narratives, concepts and images to help him identify further questions that may prove relevant.

Intellectual Conversion

The point of describing these four types of learners is to clarify how learning about learning involves an intellectual conversion.[11] What is this? *An intellectual conversion is the discovery in oneself and the implementation in one's thinking that learning is responsibly asking and answering questions about experience.*

This discovery about learning is not a discovery of one's psychological peculiarities (the arena of counselors and fiction writers). Nor is this a discovery that most people would call *scientific.* That is, it is not a discovery of some data that others can look at, listen to, smell, taste, or touch, and then verify some hypothesis by pointing to sufficient evidence in the data given by the senses. Yet the discovery does indeed meet the revered standards of scientific method. It is true that the "sufficient evidence" on what is discovered does not initially belong to the publicly available data of

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[10] *Absence of relevant questions, virtually unconditioned.* This criterion for judgment may be found in "The Transformation of the Notion of Science: From the Certain to the Probable: Science, Judgment, and Wisdom," ch. 6, sec 2.1 in *Topics in Education,* pp 146-53. See also "A Clarification," ch. 7, sec. 7, and "Critical History" of ch. 8, sec. 3 in *Method in Theology* (165-67, 185-96). The absence of relevant questions is the experiential equivalent to Lonergan's more formal designation of this criterion as a "virtually unconditioned." See "The General Form of Reflective Insight," *Insight,* 305-06 (280-81), *et passim.*

[11] *Intellectual conversion.* See "Pluralism and Conversion," sec. 3 of "Unity and Plurality" in *A Third Collection* (247-49) and "Conversions and Breakdowns" in *Method in Theology* (237-40).

sense but rather to the privately available data of consciousness. Yet it quickly enters the public forum for verification. When we explain to others our inner criteria for saying something is valid, or true, or a best available opinion, our explanation regards everyone's familiar experience of asking and answering questions, thereby prompting them to verify these criteria in themselves.

Intellectual Development

This discovery at the heart of an intellectual conversion usually evolves gradually, although the growth does seem to have distinct stages. To children, the real is what they see and hear, or what their parents tell them others saw and heard. The inner needs, fears and hopes that children experience all point to people, events and things they can picture. They are familiar with social institutions, but only as police officers, teachers, lawyers, coins, banks, and city halls—things they can see or imagine. They lay a foundation that some, like Eve, never fully transcend.

With schooling, youngsters learn to form, compare, and combine concepts. People can be categorized by their roles—teachers, parents, grocers, police. Moral concepts of honesty, stealing, lying, fairness, right, and wrong that can apply to any number of concrete, imaginable people, events, and things. This lays a foundation that some, like Conrad, never fully transcend.

Adolescents are taught their history. They learn that present nations are the results of wars and leaders, and that new wars and leaders can always rearrange the global map. They study the ways of different cultures—how they worship, haggle in the marketplace, raise their children, and bury their dead. This opens a new world to them, the world of meanings and values that define all social and cultural institutions. This lays a foundation that some, like Narella, never fully transcend.

Later adolescents come to realize that not all their beliefs are true. In science, they learn that not all hypotheses pan out under testing. Even religious ideas can be tested, as a high school senior once asked a teacher friend of mine, "Sir, is our God the real God?" They learn to form judgments on their own. Having discovered the fault line in human creativity, they test stories for truth. They test explanations to make sure they fit the evidence. They learn that all the beliefs, theories, stories and moral doctrines passed on to them are not unquestionable starting points for their additional learning. Rather they are answers to questions raised by other people in other times. This lays the foundation for a commitment to living in reality

and passing judgment on any claim or story. Like Abe, they add to their learning by raising their own critical questions about what they read and hear from others, which often requires some unlearning of what turned out to be erroneous.

Summary

We considered many interlocking hypotheses about how we learn. I will summarize them here, but it is important to understand these as hypotheses, as more or less plausible explanations of how learning works. They need verification. And the only verification needed, or possible, is your own. If you like what you read here only because of what practical use it may have, you stand with Eve. If you like it only because of its logical coherence, you stand with Conrad. If you like it only because it brings historical scholarship into moral reflection, you stand with Narella. But if you noted what happens when you learn anything, and find that these hypotheses explain what happens in you more thoroughly than any other currently available explanation, then, with Abe, you will have successfully verified what you learned about learning. Moreover, if, like Abe, you appeal to these norms in your discussions with others, and if your appeal to the exigencies of consciousness makes sense to them as well, you contribute toward the ongoing, common verification of how anyone learns anything.

Here, then, are the main hypotheses about learning we considered so far, plus those I presented elsewhere in *Doing Better:*

- What prompts us to learn are distinct normative drives on the levels of experience, of understanding, of reason, and of responsibility.

- The fulfillment of each lower drive leads us to the next higher drive.

- These normative drives are the source of everything anyone has ever learned.

- These normative drives do not work perfectly. They are impeded by dysfunctional elements in our heritage, biases in consciousness (personal neuroses, egotism, group bias, commonsensism), and the willfulness or sin by which we act against our better judgment.

- Learning about learning does not give a recipe on how to learn. Rather, it gives an explanation about the nature of learning, by which one's learning is rendered more effective.

- An intellectual conversion is needed to realize for oneself that learning is responsibly asking and answering questions about experience.

- Dialog among people of open minds can function as an invitation to intellectual conversion and as ongoing verification of what the criteria for learning are for anybody.

- The range of possible learning includes more than common sense and science. It also includes scholarship, the arts, a philosophy based on the data of consciousness, and of one's personal efforts to live in God's love.

As ethicists, we can expect that when we share our opinions on moral issues with others we might also share the questions that helped us form these opinions. This may well engage them in a sincere examination of the puzzlements and questions that shaped their own opinions. And when new experiences and new questions arise, we can expect that our shared learning will more readily deal with what our current views do not explain well enough.

Choosing How We Choose

Besides learning, there is also choosing. And besides the millions of particular and strategic choices we make every day, there is also a fundamental choice of the criteria by which we make choices.

We make choices every day. We decide to do something, or we decide not to do it, and that seems to be all there is to it. However, from the perspective of evolution, personal choices are elements within the massive and complex moral flux we call history. We make our choices in historical contexts where opportunities rise and fall, owing largely to the results of previous choices. When we decide to direct our resources toward some A, we direct them away from some B, C, and D. And when we decide *not* to do some A, we reserve our resources for some B, C, or D. All decisions are choices among alternatives. For every opportunity we explore, we advance world process in a direction that leaves other opportunities unexplored.

Strategic Choices Shape History

Our choices change history, but not only through the conglomerated effects of innumerable particular choices. We also learned how to *eliminate* huge numbers of particular choices by making strategic choices—a skill passed down to us from our distant ancestors that we now refer to as a *policy.* We say, "From now on we will ..." or "A better way of handling these issues is to ...." Strategic choices may be collaborative, as when business leaders negotiate contracts and legislators write laws, or they may be individual, as when I commit myself to daily exercise. Strategic choices

eliminate the need to refresh our knowledge and consult our feelings at every turn of events. They are the foundation of what we call a *society*, or *the social order,* understood as all the ways people habitually focus their skills on common enterprises.

This social order can break down suddenly, as when disaster strikes or when, in the absence of police, marauders roam the streets and loot the stores. It breaks down more slowly when big businesses fudge their assets or special interest groups take over the government. The justification is usually, "Everybody's doing it." But nearly everybody forgets that their laws and policies embody strategic choices made by previous generations and refined by their peers. In their place is a hodge-podge of choices made by individuals or subgroups who aim to get what they can for themselves.

The chain of antecedents and consequences of our choices is not limited to the social orders that condition our living. In every choice we also change our selves. We pursue our learning along some paths rather than others. We take on new duties and drop old ones. We strengthen some relationships and let others fade. One day it can suddenly occur to us that the kind of person we are is a result of all the choices we ever made. It dawns on us that we have not realized our full potential. We have become, shall we say, *peculiar*.

So every choice is a change in both external circumstances and in the person choosing. Moreover, depending on how valid people's understanding of a given situation is, and how authentic their priorities are, their choice may be for better or for worse. Then everyone involved in the situation faces a changed situation and shifts his or her priorities to meet it. In this manner, choice by choice, in every waking hour of every human being on our planet, better here and worse there, humans and human situations evolve.

In this mélange, we can distinguish three types of choices that any ethics needs to take into account.[12]

Particular choices include any choice of a particular good thing or event. Our needs and wants drive us to make countless particular choices every day. Some are morally insignificant—whether to order the hamburger or the

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[12]   *Choices.* Materials on three kinds of choices as corresponding to the three analogous meanings of "good" are found throughout Lonergan's works. See "The Structure of the Human Good," ch. 2, sec. 6 in *Method in Theology* (47-52)*.*

salad. Others are morally fraught—whether to badmouth a coworker or keep my mouth shut.

Strategic choices are about policies and habits. Leaders set up social institutions by committing groups and individuals to specific routines. These routines churn out a steady flow of particular good things or events. These routines typically outlive their own members, giving the group its "tradition" of how things are done.

Fundamental choices (also called "fundamental options") include one's choice of the self one is becoming through all one's particular choices and strategic choices. This type of choice is difficult to pin down because it usually sneaks up on us as the cumulative product of millions of choices of the first two types. But moral maturity usually brings one to realize, "What I make of myself is up to no one but me." Still, we usually do not attempt such an existential commitment alone. We associate with those with whom we share values; we share relationships based on what "better" means for us. Such fundamental choices, normally shared, lie behind every moral standard by which we critique our social institutions and our particular choices. This commitment to moral standards defines our cultural institutions—such as the judiciary, humanities education, the arts, and religion.

Not everyone makes all three kinds of choices. Many adults seldom deliberate before choosing some particular good; they are content to deal with immediate needs through old habits. Others might choose to develop the habits and follow the policies presented by parents and authorities but without any scrutiny to ensure that these routines will really deliver what they promise. Still others let themselves be moved entirely by particular impulses and by compliance to social pressures, with no thought about the kind of person they want to be.

In any case, it is all three kinds of choices that change history. This is what history is—the unfolding of particular, strategic, and fundamental choices for better or for worse. History's agents are those who make these choices knowingly, while those who let others do the choosing just drift with the flow. Collectively, though, it is the choice-makers—mostly anonymous—who make things really better or worse. They are the ones who direct the flow of history while the drifters glide along without argument. In this perspective, history is identical to the human moral order.

The Elements of Choices

So if we are going to maximize our chances of improving history, we need to ask ourselves, "What do we do when we choose?" This is an embarrassing question. We make choices all the time: we should blush to realize that we do not know what we are doing.

In any choice, we make two value judgments. In a first, we assess what is better and worse about a situation. In a second, we assess our options for action. These two value judgments are sandwiched by feelings.[13] Before our first assessment, we have initial feelings about better and worse in a situation. Likewise before our second assessment—what is better and worse about our options for action. Following our second assessment, we experience confirmational feelings about our choice. Then we rely on this newly integrated set of priorities to feel out the next situation. These feeling functions are carried out by the symbolizing exigence in our consciousness. That is, we are aware of an image linked to an affect that moves us toward or away from what the image represents.

Feelings and Value Judgments

The one role feelings do *not* play is to make a judgment about the actual worth of anything. Many people have yet to realize this. Just as to a naïve realist, reality is what we see, so to a naïve moralist, values are what we feel. This typically stems from childhood, where youngsters rely on their feelings as their primary indicators of values. What they like must be good; what they dislike must be bad. But with normal moral development they learn that besides their likes and dislikes, there is the further question of objective value. The meaning of *deliberation* is precisely this: to ask the question of value. And the goal of deliberation is to arrive at a value judgment: This really is better even if I don't like it.

What is more, once we see the difference between our feelings as indicators and confirmations of *possible* value and our judgments as determinations of *actual* value, we experience the exigence to be responsible for our feelings themselves. We all have trouble with our feelings, and while we appropriately resist those that lead the wrong way, most of us do this haphazardly at first. But as we mature, we notice our personal emotional

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[13]   *Feelings, value judgments.* Material on feelings and other elements that enter into judgments of value can be found in "Feelings" and "Judgments of Value," of ch. 2, secs. 2 and 4 in *Method in Theology* (30-34, 36-41).

rhythms; we get to know which feelings to trust and which to suspect. Part of moral maturity is a clear-headed commitment to take charge of our feelings. It means putting a conscientious gap between the emotional pushes we feel and a value judgment about our choices.

Criterion for Value Judgments

What happens when we make a value judgment? When we determine that a certain X is better than many Ys, we transcend the ambivalences of our feelings by affirming that X is objectively better. We open ourselves to undertake actions that change a real situation and ourselves as well. We then experience a change in how we feel, both about the situation and about ourselves. Although this change is prompted by our feelings and is secured by our feelings, it is not caused by our feelings. It is caused by our judgment of value.

The judgment of value, in itself, is simple. We make an affirmation that X is either plainly good or is better than Y. The fundamental ethical question is not *whether* we make value judgments; it is obvious that we make them all the time. Rather, the question is this: What criteria do we use to make them? When we deliberate about what may be really better, there are many secondary criteria that are often mistaken as primary—the advice of experts, the words of scripture, the commands of authorities, personal habit, and cultural priorities. But as we saw, we also choose—or disregard—our experts, our scriptures, our authorities, our habits and our inherited priorities. So, prior to these secondary criteria, there must be a more immediate criterion by which we chose among these secondary criteria. Let me state it baldly here, and then offer an explanation of how it works:[14] *The immediate criterion for value judgments is the drying up of relevant questions.*

Suppose I am offered a job. The exigence to be responsible prompts me to make a judgment about the value of accepting the offer. An exigence in my symbolic awareness loads my imagination with feelings about staying in

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[14] *Criteria for value judgments.* See "The Notion of Value" and "Judgments of Value," of ch. 2, secs. 3-4 in *Method in Theology* (34-41) and "What Are Judgments of Value" in *Philosophical and Theological Papers, 1965-1980,* 140-56. Formally, the criterion for a judgment of value is the same as for a judgment of fact or of reasonableness: the fulfillment of conditions on a proposition, or more succinctly, a virtually unconditioned. With both kinds of judgments we experience an absence of relevant questions. Still, on the level of judgments of value, the question of my own self-transcendence is far more prominently relevant because of the enlarged engagement of my entire self, an engagement that always occurs in the context of my affective horizon.

my current job and about moving on. These images and feelings prompt questions about doing better: What would my parents do in this situation? What might be the long-range outcomes of each option? Is it better to be loyal to my current employer or to courageously seize a promising opportunity? What do my friends think is better? What is better for my family? What kind of person might I become in each option?

Of course, I could just go along with old habits or the opinions of others. Or I could just not choose, and stay where I am. But if I do make the judgment that one option is probably better than the other, it is because I have addressed all the relevant questions. Some questions I may answer easily, others I may remain tentative about, and still others may not turn out as relevant as I first thought. But when no further relevant questions arise, I make a value judgment in the form, "X is probably better than Y."

Moral Conviction

I say that my value judgment affirms that X is "probably" better than Y because in most cases I am conscious of two facts: One is that I may not have answered all the questions that occurred to me. The other is that I have to admit that I don't know all the relevant questions. I may lack information about X that would raise new questions. Certainly I lack some of that farsightedness that notices all the opportunities and risks that lie within my range of options. No doubt, I have uncritically absorbed certain values from my culture. The very connotations of my language carry unquestioned priorities about who really counts in life, and how people ought to behave. The ethical principles I rely on may be revised by new ethical theories that would pose unanticipated questions. So I say that X is "probably" better because my value judgment is conditioned by the fact that I simply have not considered all the relevant questions. The reason we call some people "wise" is because they know more relevant questions than the rest of us. This permanent possibility of new questions makes it clear that in our choices about particular things, as well in our strategic choices about policies and habits, we can only do our best, and our best can only approach the really better. In many cases, as we saw earlier, we cannot expect moral certitude.

Still, we must choose, and very often we choose without hesitation. On what grounds can we justify choosing when we are not certain? On what grounds can we say that any choice is "objective"? There is a parallel here between the objectivity of our moral judgments and the objectivity of judgments in science. Scientists do not aim for objective truth. They aim for the best available explanation of specific data, knowing that further questions may arise from new data or new scientific models. Their

objectivity is an expectation that the exigence to be intelligent and reasonable can increasingly approach full knowledge. They toss out ideas that looked good on paper but did not work out in practice. These exigencies are the driving energies in an entire community of scientists, producing ideas that build on each other and are successively validated by experience. So too with our deliberations. We seldom claim moral certitude. Rather, we base our moral judgments on the answers to the questions we happen to have considered, knowing that further questions can arise. Our moral objectivity is an expectation that the exigence to be responsible, working in an entire community of caring people, produces value judgments that ever more closely approach what is really better and that devalue earlier judgments that turned out to be biased or nor longer relevant to the changing times.

So between an unattainable moral certitude and a nihilistic moral relativism, we humans together assume that among all the value judgments ever made there is a massive subset that based on common convictions about what is really better or really worse. We rely on the ongoing normativity of responsibility, working among many people, to monitor and refine our evaluations of historical trends. We make assertions about what progress or decline has occurred in technology, economics, politics, education, and law. We propose new exemplars, principles, policies, procedures, and standards that show promise of improving life. But we express our commitment to these assertions and proposals by a careful use of language. We claim, not moral "certitude," but moral "conviction"—a state of mind and heart that is fully ready to commit ourselves to a course of action based on best available moral opinions.

Still, this is not to say that all moral judgments are open to revision. There is one judgment that we cannot question. It is the judgment that being responsible is better than being irresponsible. For we cannot responsibly ridicule being responsible. More commonly, there are the innumerable moral judgments that we, as a race, have effectively established beyond question: The Second World War was a horrible tragedy. Abortions of mere convenience cannot be justified. The disparity of standards of living across the globe should be redressed. The "beyond question" is the key here. For we are a people who experience normative demands to do better. And this "better" that we actually accomplish builds up a legacy of virtually unquestionable moral judgments for future generations.

Moral Conversion

We saw that the drying up of relevant questions is the immediate criterion for value judgments. And we noted how most everyday value judgments are as open to revisions as any scientific theory because new relevant questions may well be asked. But if the absence of relevant questions is the criterion for making value judgments, we come to a more basic question: How, in everyday decisions, do we recognize whether or not a moral question is relevant? An abstract criterion is easy to state: Moral questions are relevant if they are directed toward the really better. But concretely speaking, people rely on different notions of what "really better" means when they make value judgments. So to examine more closely how we deliberate about better and worse, we need to distinguish between different notions of what "really better" means to actual people.

Right away we can notice a basic difference. A man may equate "really better" with mere preference. He chooses X over Y based on nothing more than his unquestioned predilection for X. In contrast, a woman may equate "really better" with what responsible deliberation reveals. She chooses X over Y because her deliberation aimed at knowing what is better regardless of her spontaneous preference. For those who follow mere preference, it is usually personal interest and personal payoff that makes a question relevant, and nothing else. For those who pursue the notion of "really better," what makes a question relevant is the good that transcends what individuals or groups may spontaneously prefer. The expression, "really better" carries the same objectivity for them as the expression, "really true."

With this distinction in mind, we may now define a moral conversion: Moral conversion is a choice of the truly better over what is merely preferred as one's criterion for all choices.[15] In this definition, moral conversion represents not any particular choice, nor any strategic choice, but rather the third kind of choice: a fundamental choice of a self-transcending criterion for choosing. As a self-transcending choice, it represents an entry into a fully open moral horizon. The person is open to any question about what is really better. It is fundamental because it affects all of one's strategic and particular choices. It is a choice of how one chooses.

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[15]   *Mere preference.* Lonergan defines moral conversion as a change in the criterion of one's decisions and choices from satisfactions to values. See "Conversions and Breakdowns" ch. 10, sec. 2 of *Method in Theology* (p. 240). The term *satisfaction* can cause some confusion because there is satisfaction in becoming self-transcendent. So I suggest that "mere preference" gives a more accurate contrast to self-transcendence.

However, no one's moral horizon is either thoroughly open or thoroughly closed. Children necessarily have a self-absorbed moral horizon. Good parents draw them to consider the "really better" in an objective sense. As children grow into adults, they face a fundamental choice of whether to go beyond their self-absorbed preferences and embrace a self-transcending way of living. They may make this choice inadvertently as a pattern of moral objectivity emerges among their particular and strategic choices. Or they may have discovered one day that putting mere preferences above everything else stings the conscience. The exigence to be responsible may turn them toward an unrestricted openness to what is better in itself, without confining it to what comforts their egos or the sensibilities of their community. Still, they are free. It is up to them to decide whether to carry on in self-absorption or to shift their lives toward self-transcendence.

But wait: Is acting out of mere preference all that bad? Even mere preference now and then does some good. A doctor who advises surgery chiefly for financial reasons will still save lives. What is wrong with that? Nothing—as long as we restrict the meaning of any "that" to outcomes. However, when we incorporate the choosing subject in our meaning of any "that," we see plenty wrong. What counts for really doing better are not only overt outcomes but also covert inputs. The moral quality of any choice includes both chooser and chosen. Because the doctor's choice is not motivated by the exigence to be responsible, we cannot say that better was done. Indeed, the sorry part of the chooser's self-absorbed action that happens to benefit others is that it deepens his or her self-absorption.

Well, then, what about the millions of things we prefer that have no obvious "right" or "wrong" about them? Are not most of our preferences morally neutral? This objection has merit, but only within a legalistic moral worldview where only certain things are prohibited and everything else is allowed. In the fuller scope of the universe doing better, a comprehensive ethics needs to incorporate not only right and wrong but better and worse. Besides an Ethics of Law there is also an Ethics of Better.[16] Besides our history of reflection on what should be regulated by the laws and sanctions of a community, there is also our history of moral inventiveness, daring, and achievement. To resist inspirations to do better where no laws apply is still a moral shortcoming. So in an Ethics of Better there are no morally neutral areas. Everything falls on a continuous scale of better and worse. Any choice

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[16] *Ethics of Law, Ethics of Achievement*. Here, in line with an ethics of change (the theme of "doing better"), I have renamed what Lonergan called an "Ethics of Achievement" as an "Ethics of Better." See *Topics in Education,* pp. 103, 106.

based on nothing but preference, ignoring the subjective exigence to intend the really better, will be morally deficient.

Finally, a morality of mere preference has evolutionary consequences: Human preferences are just experiences. They beg understanding, verification, and responsible deployment. Unleashed from these controls of authenticity, mere preferences impede the exigence for authenticity to see what is really better and to do it. A morality of pure preference is an incoherent system, an anomaly in an evolving universe that is ripe for the higher controls of conscience and love. In contrast, a morality of obedience to the normative movements of consciousness is a privileged functioning of the harmony of the universe.

Believing in Each Other

We have been focusing on first-hand learning and choosing. In "Learning about Learning," we looked at what occurs when we understand our personal experience and how knowledge results from judging the validity of our understanding. Here, in "Choosing How We Choose," we focused on how we make value judgments based on our first-hand experience. Now we need to return to our wider context of universal process to see how believing each other is essential to growing in both learning about learning and choosing how we choose—that is about knowledge and values.

Nearly everything anyone knows and values is inherited. Each person's worldview is a predominantly shaped by believing others. What happens when we are asked to believe anyone? Suppose Lois Lane reports in the *Daily Planet* that there was a bank robbery on Main Street. I believe her if I trust her. It is a factual judgment that the bank was robbed, but prior to accepting that fact, I first make a judgment of value that Lois is worth believing. Likewise for accepting the value judgments of others. If a politician proposes that the city would do better by providing extra security for banks, I consider the worth of the proposal, but I also consider whether the politician is worth my trust. The point is this: the mentality of any person at any time is hugely maintained through a network of personal relations based on mutual trust. The facts accepted and the values cherished by most people are rooted more deeply in their *trust* of others than in any supposedly autonomous reason or solitary conscience. To believe each other, we first believe *in* each other.

Belief *in* one another underlies every fact and value we accept on the word of another. What we believe from others blends seamlessly with our first-hand learning. We each have a "mentality," a horizon, made up of

settled issues and unsettled questions. Our mentality is a working unity on which we draw to deal with everyday life without fuss about which elements we discovered personally and which we inherited. Our judgments on the trustworthiness of sources are so pervasive in our learning that we seldom notice ourselves making them. Still, when we act on information or priorities received from others and outcomes fall short of our expectations, we are bothered by questions about the trustworthiness of our sources. Now the demand for a value judgment falls into our lap. If our sources are questionable, then question we must.

Letting Love Love

This brings us to the everyday task of being our own persons while living in the shadow of ancestors, alongside companions on the journey, and as bequeathers to oncoming generations. We share the one earth; we are the inheritors of most of our morals; and we make most of our decisions within a web of affective relationships.

The Affective Movement

Of the many different ways that our affectivity might develop, there are some common elements relevant to ethics. While it is true that autonomy is a key achievement in moral development, we still identify with one another in seeking common goals. More deeply, we recognize "the other" as like ourselves insofar as he or she feels the same exigencies to live authentic lives. So, in loving others, we open our selves to mutual engagements that go beyond *doing better* to *being better together*. We experience an inner exigence to let love have its way with us, taking us down that road never travelled as our mutual engagement changes ourselves and our loved ones together. It also lifts us higher as we engage transcendent ultimates. It seems indisputable that the greatest achievement of our autonomy lies in how freely and deliberately we weave our lives in love with others.
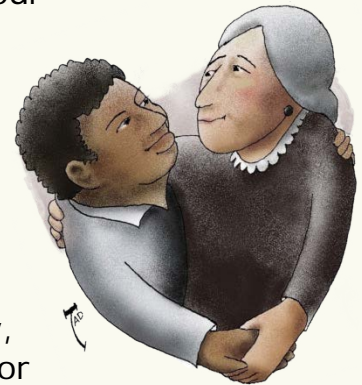
Engagement with One Another

I am speaking not only of friendships but also of our love for any humans anywhere. To see how profoundly we identify ourselves with everyone else, suppose astronomers discover an enormous asteroid headed our way, to collide with earth two years from now. They predict its impact will propel such massive amounts of earth and water into our atmosphere that the cloud will block the sun for a hundred years and all but the bugs will die.

What will the knowledge of our collective death do to us? Besides the familiar responses of individuals to their own deaths, what might our collective response be? Some will panic, some will preach God's judgment, but a great many will contemplate what it means to face the end of our race. In some ways we will act like the terminally ill, contemplating our past and facing the reality that our life is nearing not just its end but also its final meaning. But unlike the terminally ill, who pass the torch of life to survivors, we will witness together the extinguishing of the torch. Had the asteroid arrived 12 millennia ago, Homer would have spoken about the anger of the gods against us. But today, I venture, we would speak about the impending disaster in scientific terms—perhaps as an "experiment," our planet being the Petri dish in which, all along, the cosmos has been conducting tests on us. "Were we a success or a failure? Did we give as much as we took? Did we make a positive difference to the lives we shared with others?" Answers will be mixed, of course, but a cloud of regret will darken the earth. "We should have cooperated more, trusted each other more, and loved each other more." Whatever the answer, the "we" of the question reveals how deeply we identify with one another as a single race, conducting a single experiment, lasting for eons, comprising billions of individual deaths, all driven by the notion of what *we should* have done together.

Everyone experiences the same movement to open up the selves they are by transcending their mere individuality to become a "we" with others. We disagree with each other, and we act at cross-purposes, but we would feel no stress over our differences were it not for our natural desire to "get together." This exigence to bond with others is part of the "affective movement" within both human psyches and human history. This movement is a consciously experienced drive to share life. It first shows in the child's drive to be loved. It expands in the adolescent's emerging drive to love others. It matures in the adult's drive to become part of a "we" committed to love *with* others. In its mature state, one's self-love becomes a love of an engaged self. The individual is liberated from the prison of mere self-esteem and healed of the sad wish to be loved as someone useful to the hopes of others.

This affective movement directly expands our moral horizon to include the hopes and fears of others. We saw that we choose practical courses of action after considering the merits of the moral opinions we find in our heritage and fellows. Under the affective movement, we not only *consider* the moral horizons of others; we also *share* them. The horizon of a life shared with others lifts our eyes beyond the moral obligations we personally derive from ethical principles; it rises above the duties we assume by our contracts and promises. Yet, far from abrogating our individual principles

and duties, this shared view complements them by always raising the further relevant questions about the life we share: How do our decisions affect others? Who has vested interests in our decision? Whom do we consult about the situation affected by our decision? Who will benefit and who will be shortchanged? What alliances are enhanced and what alliances are threatened?

Surprisingly, this affective movement also expands our intellectual horizon. To a great extent, it works unconsciously at the level of our spontaneous imagination. Without love, we tend to imagine our knowing selves as being "in here" looking "out there"—an image that colors everything we can know, with all the problems of objectivity that this naïve realism entails. With love, we imagine our knowing selves as sharing questions with others and contributing to a common fund of knowledge. We imagine knowledge less as information to gather into our individual heads and more as contributions to what *we all* know. Together, we are the wondering children of the universe, inheriting traditional knowledge, sifting its errors, revising it to meet present circumstances, and bequeathing an intellectual heritage to future generations.

They say love casts out fear, and presumably this includes fear of the unknown. We share open-eyed wonder about life, no matter where our curiosity may lead. On the other hand, love does not cast out *all* fear. Mature love is deeply afraid of the magical thinking, mythical ideals, unrealistic hopes, and even the personal disappointments that make staying in love difficult.

Engagement with the Divine

Our inner demands to be attentive, intelligent, reasonable, responsible and in love represent a "transcending exigence" by which we experience entirely open-ended desires. In the realm of knowledge, we desire understanding and truth. In morality, we desire to make life better all around and to live as better persons. In personal engagements, we desire friendship; we desire to care for our communities; and we desire to be engaged with whatever may be the deepest source and ultimate beyond of all our desires. When we consider human consciousness as stacked systems of psyche, attention, intelligence, reason, responsibility, and love, we cannot avoid wondering about what sort of completeness in love integrates the entirety of these systems.

Although we often speak of this desired beyond and completeness as *God*, from the perspective of ethics it is particularly important to notice the

inner movement toward engaging the beyond and completeness of our lives. Only by making this inner movement a key theme in ethics can we set the table for genuine dialog among people of any religious perspective. Some believe there is no God. Others believe *in* God, but hold different truths *about* God. But prior to this believing, there is the inner movement of desires—for beauty, order, truth, goodness, and interpersonal engagement. They arise without our devising, and they are never fully satisfied. They are a form of love that springs from mysterious sources and moves toward a mysterious beyond. And so it seems natural to raise questions[17] about these desires: Whence and whither my love? Whence these inspirations and desires to open yet more? Whither lies this further beauty, order, truth, value, and personal engagement? Why are we drawn so?

These questions affect everything learned by anyone, provided only that we let the questions bother us. When they do, we may well regard all moral situations as engagements of people who experience the pull of transcendent love and the many counterpulls of a distorted heritage, biases, and willfulness. Ethicists who dismiss the question cut themselves off from understanding people for whom God is not only a value but a supreme value from whom, from whose love, the value of everything created flows. They also cut themselves off from understanding people who take seriously their personal experience of transcendent love without reliance on religion. Indeed, they cut themselves off from fully engaging their own desires. Those who dismiss the question include not only atheists who consider it meaningless but also dogmatic faithful who think they already have all the answers.

Those of religious faith who let the question of God bother them know very well that it cannot be fully answered in this life. Yet because their world includes a supernatural order that is real and that really engages their natural lives, they cannot dismiss questions like these: Are we each alone, seeking to find God, or is each of us already a part of a loving "we" with God? Are our inner thoughts and feelings really hidden from God, or might they all be completely known to God? Could it be that the consciousness by which we are present to ourselves in every act is also a share in the self-presence of God? Might some of our loves be also a generous share in God's own inner self that loves?

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[17]   *Question of God.* Material on experiencing the question of God may be found in "The Question of God," ch. 4, sec. 1 in *Method in Theology* (101-03) and in *Philosophical and Theological Papers 1965-1980,* pp. 205-08.

To live a life fully open to the affective movement is a high achievement, but it does seem quite common. Everyone has some experience of love's invitation. Those who completely reject it fall back into a dim isolation, while those who accept it enter the realm where things and people and destinies come together. They welcome mutual concern as more than an idea, more than an intellectual view of reality, more than an obligation. They welcome other persons and the new selves-in-relation they have become as holding the richest possibilities of becoming the selves they feel called to be. They recognize in one another the transcendent exigence that loves beauty, order, truth, goodness, and loving engagement without restriction. Some commit themselves wholeheartedly to philanthropy and some wholeheartedly to religion. Yet even though everyone experiences the affective movement, and many praise it, it is quite another matter to understand *how* this movement affects morality and what implications this understanding has for ethics. It requires plowing through reflections such as these.

Affective Conversion

It seems plausible to say that as people deepen their friendships and expand the field of those for whom they care, they learn to trust love itself. They would trust the inner affective movement that they neither caused themselves nor received from their friends. Yet it is doubtful that they open themselves to love because they first decide to trust love. It seems more in line with ordinary experience to say they first feel drawn into relationships and, once engaged, discover a richer, more joyful self. Looking back, they would identify the experience of being drawn as already love. Similarly, a commitment to religious love cannot be justified beforehand by any appeal to personal experience of being a richer, more joyful self. Like human love, religious engagement too is experimental; believers discover the taste of a uniquely rich joy only after yielding to the movements of love for a personal and divine beyond. Any such yielding to love is a surrender to an unknown. It is not by reading books like this that one knows the worth of love and of committing oneself to love. Without waiting for a look, you leap.

I appeal to your experience of love to recognize that a conversion is necessary. A conversion is a total opening in one's horizon through some form of commitment. Recall that I use *horizon* to refer to everything a person cares about. A fully open intellectual horizon requires an *intellectual discovery* of the unrestricted range of our questioning. A fully open moral horizon requires a *moral choice* within the unrestricted range of what may be truly better. Similarly, a fully open affective horizon requires an *affective*

commitment. We may define it as follows: *An affective conversion is a wholehearted commitment to the unrestricted range of love.*

Like other definitions in the realm of method, this one invites you to verify the terms by noticing the data of your consciousness. A "wholehearted commitment" is a personal choice to direct your affections to where love points. The "unrestricted range" of love goes beyond all arbitrary limits of love—limited, say, to possessions, to health, to success, to friends, to a group, to humanity, even to every created reality. Such a conversion obeys the impulses of the affective movement to share life without restrictions. It is letting the love in us love all the way. It cherishes the "we" that one becomes with others. While intellectually prudent about dangerous liaisons, it puts no apriori exclusions on who might belong to one's potential fellows. It brings one to the brink of welcoming the "we" that one may always have been with one's creator. By itself, an affective conversion opens one at least to the question of God, while those who engage God as alive and always at work on our behalf enter a horizon by a conversion more properly called religious.[18]

Healing the Ethicist

By now it should be apparent that the implications of an affective conversion for ethics are first the implications for ethicists themselves. An open affectivity heals a creativity wounded by biases in our intelligence. Where this healing occurs in ethicists, it not only widens the scope of their personal concerns; it also expands the range of questions they can ask about the public moral issues they are committed to resolving.

For neurosis, we may imagine that ethicists who experience how love dissolving their obsessions will have first-hand familiarity with the tricks of repression. It would alert them to the possibility that people's public condemnations of certain behaviors are fueled by repressed fears about quite private matters. So they tread delicately, probing for that narrow gate where one can disagree with people's moral opinions without enflaming their fears. Indeed, sometimes ethicists need to probe their own over-the-top emotional responses to publicly debated issues.

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[18] Omitted here from the book are several paragraphs describing how one's affective conversion expands from a basic breakthrough, through notional developments, to a fully transcendent horizon.

For egotism, an affective commitment to the full range of love certainly opens ethicists' horizons beyond self-absorbed concerns. But it also would give them a higher viewpoint on that most revered principle in ethics—the autonomy of the individual. True, the appeal to the autonomous individual conscience is necessary to drive a stake in the ground against outside pressures to conform without argument. Still, it can hardly stand alone against all moral problems. Even ethicists who, like Luther, say, "Here I stand; I can do no other," will likely add, "...but I do not stand alone." Their values are hugely inherited from ancestors and widely shared with companions.

Probably the most stubborn obstacle to an expanding affective horizon is what Lonergan calls *group bias*—the bias for what benefits one's own group to the exclusion of the good of other groups. It is stubborn because the well-being of a group thrives on affective bonding. Where egotists look for personal payoffs in the future, group bias turns the group attention to shared stories of the past—particularly group victories. It is said that Margaret Mitchell, author of *Gone with the Wind* and the compelling stories of Confederate gumption in the Civil War she heard from her uncles, was in her teens before she learned that the Confederacy lost. Among ethicists, this kind of group pride may show in a group fixation about a single moral issue or in a hero-worship of an ethical theorist such as Kant or Rawls. Ethicists whose affectivity is not hemmed in by group pride hear the same deep concern in foreigners. They probe for common ground in the shared moral question rather than in the comforts of belonging to the club.

An open affective horizon also has an indirect but important effect on commonsensism. Ethicists may rely on the social sciences and historical studies to understand moral problems, but those who are affectively closed pit answers against answers, doctrine against doctrine, philosophy against philosophy, authority against authority, while those who are affectively open speak heart to heart, listening for the underlying question behind the sometimes dogmatic opinion. They avoid debates between the bullheaded; they prefer the dialog with the open-minded. They include their own horizons as possibly part of the "moral problem" they discuss, asking themselves questions like: "What's going on among us from a social and political perspective? What moral anthropology have I assumed without question? What economic interests are driving my decisions? What historical events have shaped our present moral questions?"

Finally, the affective movement has the power to heal one's personal habits of acting against one's better judgment—one's willfulness, or, in religious terms, one's sins against God and oneself. This healing may be

characterized by a single word: forgiveness. Certainly an ethicist can privately regret personal willful decisions, but when someone else forgives him or her, the "we" of whom the ethicist is a part is made stronger, and any future individual willfulness becomes also a sin against an "us."

Unfortunately today, ethicists of all stripes—philosophical and theological, professional and lay—exclude questions that ordinarily are prompted by their experience of the affective movement. Why so many ignore questions about love is difficult to say. In some cases, it is because they have not heard anyone seriously ask how far love can go. In other cases, they heard the question quite clearly, but their egos, frightened at the prospect of losing autonomy, suppress it. In either case, they have grown accustomed to being pulled by a blinkered horse.