

Theological ethics responding to Darwinism: explaining the capacity for self-transcendence

I think the challenge to an ethics of character mounted by evolutionary psychology can be met with a clearly defined explanatory concept of human self-transcendence. My twofold strategy in this is to reformulate the notion of objectivity operative in the sciences such that it allows for other kinds of knowledge properly speaking (Lonergan); and, secondly, to introduce an understanding of the non finite reality implied in the capacity for self-transcendence which is fully compatible with a unitary picture of the world (Rahner). But the revelation in the evolutionary sciences of how through our moral intuitions we are inserted into the pre-personal world calls for a shift in emphasis in ethics, highlighting our ability or lack thereof to negotiate our feelings, and calling for more attention to be paid to the intersubjective dimension of character growth. The import of this is seen by framing the debate within a general notion of a cultural shift, from a theory-driven modern period to a postmodern turn to the existential and historical subject. In these latter points I draw largely on the Lonergan-influenced ideas of Robert Doran.

I. Introduction

The insights of evolutionary ethics show that our unreflective moral motivations, which could previously have been taken as responding to objective norms, have their genesis in the mechanisms and survival strategies of the species. I argue that this revelation of how through our moral feelings we are inserted into the pre-personal world calls for a shift in our thinking about ethics, driven by the concern about the quality of our negotiation of such insights. Before we begin properly to discriminate among them, it is our feelings about things that open us up in a general way to being motivated by values. The capacity to come to terms with our complex and multi-leveled feeling response to the world is central to moral growth and thus to the plausibility of an effective and autonomous role for ethics in society.

Challenging that role are various evolutionary ethicists. I will approach the topic by way of taking issue with a quite different response to the findings of Darwinian research. Janet Radcliffe Richards (*Human Nature after Darwin*, 2000) argues that once we see their origin in evolutionary strategies we can no longer trust our deepest feelings as clues to the moral order – her example is that of wanting retribution¹. We can then see that the moral order is simply what we construct. This entails, she argues, a rejection of any virtue or character ethics, which presupposes a role to human ideas and projects relatively autonomous of the patterns of events verifiable in the biological sciences. And this is disallowed by Darwinism.

I take this as a crucial problem. I have attempted to show elsewhere (Giddy, 2006; 2007) how much a virtue and character ethics matters in the context of contemporary culture, and in particular developing countries, the alternative simply being simply a greater police force. However it is true that no longer is an ethic of “objective moral order” plausible if it ignores the consciousness of the emergent new, an aspect of reality that has dawned on us in particular with the influence of Darwin and the evolutionary way of thinking. The upshot of this is the need to spell out the normative structure of responsibility. Feelings are not simply “there”, in a one-dimensional way; we respond more or less unreflectively to satisfactions but we can also have feelings about the values thrown up by our intelligent insight into the truly worthwhile. The key to unlock the understanding of ethics in this new thought-context is, I argue, to be found in the human capacity for self-transcendence.

My starting point is the argument of Dennett and others that in the wake of Darwinism no recourse is now possible to an explanatory schema outside the natural sciences, and this includes so-called “mental” activities. In reply to this I will present, following Bernard Lonergan (*Method in Theology*, 1972, *Insight*, 1958), the idea that all knowledge has a personal dimension, a developmental aspect, which can to be clarified by the notion of intellectual conversion, and ethical and religious understanding involves yet further existential re-orientations, precisely defined, in a personal narrative. Objectivity is not a matter of noting what is “really out there” but an achievement of the natural dynamism or orientation of one’s intentionality, i.e. of self-transcendence. Whatever knowledge the sciences yield, this cannot overthrow what is the very basis of the scientific enterprise, namely our capacity for such self-transcendence, for reaching the truth of the matter in an act of self-judgment critical of one’s particular perspective. The achievement of truth is clearly a matter of the quality of one’s judgment, which is revealed as a norm or value operative in the whole process of inquiry. This dethrones the status of “facts” as somehow validated apart from our values, and opens the way to appreciating the role in ethics of our *feelings* about ourselves as self-transcending.

The idea of self-transcendence opens up the question of a non finite operative power, a religious dimension. But here too (I will show with the help of Karl Rahner’s *Hominisation*, 1965) nothing is being suggested to contradict the assumption of the unity of nature. Rahner draws on the Hegelian idea of the human spirit as sublating what is other than itself to argue that self-transcendence is not to be understood as sitting *alongside* the immersion of human persons in the world in accordance with the evolutionary perspective. This commitment to a unitary view is summed up in the affirmation, against any presumption that there is “a supernatural intervention” in nature, in particular human nature, that “parents beget a human being” (1965: 94).

The fact of moral impotence calls, in the third place, for particular attention to a further dimension, namely the intersubjective and psychotherapeutic elements in the achievement of a sensitivity open to moral values. Following Robert Doran (1990; 1994) I argue that psychotherapy needs to be placed within an ethical framework if it is not to be simply a form of manipulation characteristic of the managerial society, as Alisdair MacIntyre famously contended in his classic account of contemporary ethics, *After Virtue* (1981: 29). The impasse of personal growth can, furthermore, be properly addressed by reference to a religious dimension, the factor of healing being part and parcel of any proper ethics that is not to remain unconvincingly abstract. This unitary but fully personal perspective can be clarified by adverting to a shift in cultural framework, from an emphasis on correct theory to one focused more on the particularities of concrete historical existence and the problematic nature of any achievement of core values.

II. Evolutionary Ethics and the Role of Feelings

In one favourite version of the point of view we can term “scientism,” biological categories are seen to be sufficient to explain human behaviour without remainder. For purposes of our discussion a couple of well known texts will suffice. Dennett for example, has it that it is an illusion that anything more needs to be added to the biological, evolutionary, explanation. It might have been thought so before Darwin, as Locke argued: “It is impossible to conceive that ever bare incogitative Matter should produce a thinking intelligent Being, as that nothing should of itself produce Matter” (in Richards, 2000: 103). Richards comments, “a mechanism by which mindless processes might produce the kind of complexity that had previously seemed explicable only in terms of intentions and powers of what Locke called a cogitative Being” (2000: 17). After Darwin however we realize how Locke was mistaken, as Dennett argues in his *Darwin’s Dangerous Idea*: “If mindless evolution could account for the breathtakingly clever artifacts of the biosphere, how could the products of our own ‘real’ minds be exempt from an evolutionary explanation?” So this dissolves “the illusion of our own authorship, our own divine spark of creativity and understanding” (quoted in Richards, 2000: 22), the qualification “divine” being added as a rhetorical device to set off alarm bells, indicating possible recourse to the widely discredited appeal to our religious origins.

But this seems to be to false, shown by the counter example of Dennett’s own free action in putting forward what he implies is a reasonable hypothesis, in other words a hypothesis argued for freely on the basis of a belief formed by adhering to categories (and hence properly explicable only in terms of such categories) to do with standards and norms of human responsible action in the area of debates of this nature: attentiveness to the data, intelligence in offering an explanatory hypothesis, careful

consideration of the possible objections to this hypothesis. And this implicitly assumes a human power or capacity to do this, a “spark of creativity and understanding”. To be sure, this kind of knowledge of the human capacity can only be grasped “from the inside” as it were, and not scientifically. We have explained Dennett’s contribution to the debate by bringing in categories such as the value of truth and responsibility (to express the truth of the matter). Such categories are not investigated by any of the sciences. Sociology for example studies values only in the sense of explaining what a certain group of people might be expected to believe (in Eskimo culture, or African traditional culture, say), that is to say, trends, not how any one particular person (for example, a contributor to a debate) does actually behave. In the latter case we typically invoke the category of acting in accordance with what one believes is the most genuinely right or worthwhile thing to do, and not only in accordance with but *for the sake of* that value. To grasp the person’s reasons for action (in this case, their putting forward a particular argument) one has to appreciate at least the possible genuine, i.e. objective, merit of what they are saying and of their action in saying it. One analyses it under the category of normative responsible action. The human sciences in general on the other hand prescind from questions of *objective* value in this sense.

Ethics explained without remainder in evolutionary terms leaves us without an autonomous standard for values. Nature, argues Richards (2000: 242), does not prescribe how we ought to act. In point of fact our “natural” feelings – her example is that of the feeling of the need for retribution – can be misleading. Her argument is that in the absence of any clear idea of what free will amounts to, punishment should be seen simply as deterrence. Similarly Michael Ruse argues, “The Darwinian is the first to accept and stress the difference between ‘is’ and ‘ought’, between statements about matters of fact, like normal feelings, and statements about matters of obligation, as occur in morality” (1986: 250). The distinction is “fundamental” to the Darwinian analysis of morality. On our account however, the kind of personal knowledge gained of one’s capacity for free self-determination, is at once factual and normative, it is knowledge of a standard for acting. This will imply that the ‘is’/‘ought’ distinction is not fundamental: when we affirm ourselves as what we are (in act) we also affirm the value of this. They are not two separate acts of insight, first the fact and then affirming the value of it. And that implies we implicitly affirm the value of our *capacities* to understand and to value, and of the need for all feelings (such as that for retribution) to be negotiated within a whole spectrum of emotive responses.

It is no doubt true that there are evolutionary mechanisms, to do with kin selection and reciprocal altruism, to combat selfishness and promote behaviour that is conducive to social order. Michael Ruse calls these mechanisms “epigenetic rules”. But, Ruse contends, the notion that altruism is of

genuine or objective value, is simply an illusion, but a “collective illusion foisted on us by our genes” (1986: 253). In a similar vein to Richards, he points to a lack of any autonomous moral reasoning. After all, he says, “why should I care whether you are upset at my stealing your food and clothing?” (1986: 253).

Ruse’s rhetorical question reveals an ambiguity in our actually operative feelings, vacillating between moral and self-centered. A failure to make this explicit will result in the lack of proper attention to the conditions for the development of our motivational integrity. But how, he would ask, can anything, such as a value, not verifiable by the sciences have an “objective” status? In clarifying this we can keep in mind that Ruse’s own suggestion, that the very effectiveness of the illusion of moral objectivity for maintaining social order is a good reason not to do away with the moral vision of things, seems to imply such effectiveness is a genuine, i.e. objective, value.

III. Conversion, Intellectual and Moral

The technical term for the kind of argument “from the inside” that I have been appealing to in the discussion above with evolutionary ethicists, is “retortion.” A retortive argument appeals to what cannot be denied without a contradiction between one’s statement and what is propositionally implied in the actual performance of making the statement. Introducing his book *Insight* (1958) Lonergan adverts to the fact that his argument is not to be thought of “as though it described some distant region of the globe, which the reader never visited, or some strange and mystical experience, which the reader never shared....the point is to discover, to identify, to become familiar with the activities of one’s own intelligence...’ (xix)². One can test for oneself the plausibility of the argument. Lonergan argues that knowing is a conjunction of experiencing, understanding, and judging, and to this is added the norm of being responsible. Could it be possible that knowing and agency is something radically *other* than this? Lonergan comments: “Not even behaviorists claim that they are unaware whether or not they see or hear, taste or touch. Not even positivists preface their lectures and their books with the frank avowal that never in their lives did they have the experience of understanding anything whatever. Not even relativists claim that never in their lives did they have the experience of making a rational judgment. Not even determinists claim that never in their lives did they have the experience of making a responsible choice.” By this method it cannot be denied that we are indeed “empirically, intellectually, rationally, morally conscious” (Lonergan, 1973: 21).³

On the basis of this retortive argument we can see that, contrary to what is held to be the case in “scientism”, objectivity is not a matter of verifying what is “really out there” but an achievement of

the natural dynamism or orientation of one's intentionality, i.e. of self-transcendence. While the natural sciences posit a horizon of possible objects which change without affecting any change in the observer, in the case of philosophical and existential topics this is not so, and a corresponding change in the subject is called for. In particular on the questions of what is knowing, what is reality, and what is objectivity opposing answers throw up a dialectic, to which an existential resolution or conversion is appropriate.

All three questions are bound to arise, because of the duality of human knowing, which is a given. What is meant by this? From the world of immediacy that is the whole of the new-born infant's world we move, with the acquisition of language, to a world mediated by meaning: not simply by being oriented by the pressing demands of our biological needs but also by our responses to values. We can think, because we can unlike the pre-linguistic toddler grasp things "in the mind" without grasping them with the fingers or the mouth. I can also question whether or not what I have *experienced* is in point of fact what I *have supposed it* to be. Our intention here is not defined by a limited set of options: rather, it is open-ended, aims at what is true, is a response to what one must admit is a natural desire to know, to the built-in law of the human spirit, the normative dynamism that is uncovered as one pays attention to oneself in action. "Because we can experience, we should attend. Because we can understand, we should inquire. Because we can reach the truth, we should reflect and check. Because we can realize values in ourselves and promote them in others, we should deliberate. In the measure we follow these precepts, in the measure we fulfill these conditions of being human persons, we also achieve self-transcendence, both in the field of knowledge and in the field of action." (Lonergan, 1996: 319)

First, however, the duality in our knowing is a hurdle that has to be cleared. For both kinds of knowing have their point. Elementary knowing proves its point by survival, while any attempt to dispute the validity of *intellectual knowing* reveals its incoherence in involving the use of that knowing. Clarifying the distinction is a moment of "conversion". Analogously, there is a growth moment on the level of ethics, when one awakes to the attractiveness of living by values, of finding the response in one's set of desires not just to what will satisfy but to what is simply good.

Lonergan (1972: 238-9) explains it well. "Intellectual conversion is a radical clarification of an exceedingly stubborn and misleading myth concerning reality, objectivity, and human knowledge. The myth is that knowing is like looking, that objectivity is seeing what is there to be seen and not seeing what is not there, and that the real is what is out there now to be looked at." But, Lonergan continues, "knowing is not just seeing. Nor is objectivity reached through seeing alone (but through

seeing, understanding and judging). And the real is not just what we can touch and see: it is what we aim at getting to know through being attentive, being intelligent, and being reasonable in our judgments.”⁴

In contrast to the mistaken tendency in modern philosophy Lonergan says forget extroversion as the model for securing objectivity. Objectivity is properly understood as precisely a quality of our reasonableness: it is the achievement of our intellectual capacities, it is moving to a new level, from simply sense experiencing to being intelligent to reflective judgment of the probable accuracy of our ideas. The implication for our topic is important, for in the absence of this understanding “the real” will be thought of in terms of some or other “body”, the already out there now. Tables, chairs, limbs and brains will pass muster as “real”, but the difficulty will be in accommodating things such as “myself”, for which Hume, for example, struggled to find any verification. And that means that we can envisage bodies within bodies, within the cell there are molecules and the molecules are made up of atoms, and so on. And so we are pushed towards the obvious corollary: it’s the analysis in terms of the basic parts, such as genes, that is the goal of inquiry.

There is another implication of this clarification of the structures of self-transcending, the dynamism which specifies what is knowing and what is willing. For while religions are a response to difficulties in the achievement of human goals and aspirations (ideas of “god” always correspond to a power responding to human need), philosophical reflection on religion has, under the influence of the “unconverted” picture of knowledge, predominantly been about “what exists”, omitting the personal dimension which we have noted has been largely forgotten in modern philosophy. While religions speak to the need for a power in whom we can put our trust (“belief in”), philosophy of religion addresses by and large the question of “belief that”, a matter of intellectual assent rather than of what one should commit oneself to in an act which involves the quality of one’s willingness as well as the direction of one’s emotions.⁵

Parallel to this is the discussion of moral values in the absence of a proper analysis of personal growth and the motivational structure of the person. The “ought” is discussed as a dimension which takes off from a starting point which is distinguished from the “is”. But it is when one realizes the extent to which one is blocked in one’s psychic energy, in one’s very self, that the need for a discussion of the intersubjective conditions for human agency becomes clear. Self-transcendence in the matter of values is a question of consistently consenting to the desire for what I have discerned is the most worthwhile. There is no choice, no free self-determination, without desires, and desires are what are apprehended in feelings. The forgetfulness of the subject is a neglect of attending to our

feelings. And it goes hand in hand with inattention paid to the interpersonal dimension of the achievement of character, and so of a community worth living in.

First, however, I want to deal with the notion that our capacity for self-transcendence is something added onto matter, a crucial mistake, confounding and taking away the force of our critique of the bifurcations mentioned above. Clarifying this point will point us in the direction of the need to take into account the emotive element crucial to a properly concrete account of the existential subject.

IV. Divine Action in the Context of Evolutionary Theory

Rahner's starting point is a comment that it is "a prejudice common among scientists" to suppose that it is obvious what precisely "matter" is, "and then subsequently and laboriously and very problematically have to 'discover' spirit [self-transcendence] in addition, and can never properly know whether what it signifies cannot after all be reduced to matter in the end" (1965: 47). In point of fact we know from the first what self-transcendence is. It is precisely openness to whatever might appear as object, and only because of this openness can we ask what "matter" might be. Rahner uses the term "spirit" to refer to the capacity for "transcendental experience", what we have outlined as human self-awareness and the dynamism driven by our capacity to ask questions. In this perspective we can define matter precisely as what is not self-transcendence, i.e. as "what is closed to a dynamic orientation above and beyond itself towards being in general" (1965: 52).

What Rahner terms "moderate evolution" affirms a real genetic connection between human biological reality and the animal kingdom, without saying anything about the whole reality of human persons or their origin (1965: 62). What is clear is that evolution involves an increase in being, in the sense that while plants "have their being" in a less complex and self-initiating way than do animals, and finally human beings have their being by virtue of being able to take up an attitude to the whole of it, most eloquently seen in the culturally universal practice of symbolizing our awe in the face of death, ceremoniously burying the dead.

But we can't simply juxtapose self-transcendence and the biological in human beings. How then can the substratum of matter produce by its own powers the new (i.e. spirit). More can't simply come from less. The key would be the idea of a non-finite reality as the ground of the possibility of any becoming which involves an increase of being. This is not to be thought of as side-by-side with the finite cause. Rahner puts it this way: "The relation of the absolute ground of being to the finite agent, when becoming is effected which is truly an increase and not just a variation, must rather be

envisaged in such a way that the absolute ground of being and becoming is always regarded as a factor linked to the finite agent and belonging to it, though transcending it” (1965:75). It is not a movement within absolute being, which remains free, unmoved but giving movement, an unmoved mover. The infinite acts through secondary causes. The rising above itself in becoming takes place because the absolute being is the cause and ground of this self-movement.

This can be illustrated in the case of a demythologized point about the creation of a new person. The new person is not simply the product of his or her environment. This has been expressed by saying the creator God is the immediate cause. But we could less misleadingly say that the capacity for self-transcendence is there in finite being, and the parents beget not a material body but a human being. So if our characteristic human activity is self-transcendence, then we can say, with Rahner, that “the parents are the cause of the one entire human being and so also of its soul, because ...the parents can only be the cause of the human being in virtue of the power of God which renders possible their self-transcendence” (1965: 99).

And this way of understanding could also apply to the beginning of humankind. It may not be possible to indicate concretely and unmistakably where the dividing line runs between animal and man: “nevertheless we know that man is not merely an animal with a somewhat different and more complicated structure” (1965: 106). The difference, in Rahner’s terminology, is between spirit and non-spirit, “between intellectual dynamism, transcendence, of limitless scope as a condition of possibility of the most primitive human life, and the intrinsically restricted horizon of a consciousness from which its own bounds are hidden” (1965: 106).

The religious dimension is explained here in a way that is fully in accordance with the basic evolutionary framework.⁶ This is important for our understanding of ethics as expressing precisely what is newly constituted *through* our capacity for self-transcendence, for living in accordance with what we have discovered is truly of value. For the problematic nature of any sustained ethical living has to be made thematic and the element of healing and grace is part and parcel of any adequate account of this, as we will now argue more fully.

V. Mediation of Dispositional Immediacy

We have uncovered what occurs in the dialectic of the subject, faced by a duality which can be objectified at the level of the intellect but also at the level of the will. But how is moral conversion actually constituted? The critical question raised above about human self-transcendence will now be discussed, and I find it useful to rely here on a few points of criticism raised in respect of Augustine

Shutte's description of the intersubjective conditions for personal growth. Which of my competing desires should I affirm?

Shutte's description of the problem, or predicament, is worth quoting. "If my self-knowledge is incomplete, then I do not know what I really want. I will not know which desires to consent to and which to inhibit. Insofar as I encourage the superficial desires, I will increase the division in myself since the deep desires which I am suppressing will not go away but will instead persist in growing opposition to the rest" (1993: 83). And affirming a false self makes matters worse. "In order to maintain the illusory harmony and identity I have constructed, I suppress all awareness of my real desires and all recognition of beliefs that contradict my illusions. So it is a vicious circle: lack of self-knowledge makes genuine self-affirmation impossible, the inability to affirm oneself wholeheartedly prevents real self-knowledge." (1993: 83). I am not truly open to the project of personal growth.

Because of this impasse in personal growth there is an inevitable "turn to the other." Shutte points to the technique of psychoanalysis as an example. In coming to identify with the analyst I affirm his set of beliefs and desires which are ordered in a more integrated way: my blocks apply less to him. And in getting to know and affirm him, I get to know and affirm the deep desires that pertain to the human nature that we both share.

In his critical evaluation of Shutte's argument (expressed in his 1987 article) Michael Martin (1990) has argued that psychoanalysis as practiced does not of course always see itself in this way. In point of fact what might be revealed to the patient is a desire that is ethically unacceptable "and the patient with the analyst's help may have to learn to sublimate it." In other words the deep desire, it might be thought, is not all what must be affirmed. This criticism calls for a reply, clarifying the framing philosophical anthropology behind Shutte's understanding of psychoanalysis, which would exclude the possibility of a person's *basic* orientation (desire) to be somehow ethically unacceptable. I take this to have been done, for psychology in general as a human science, by Robert Doran (1990, 1994). Doran's proposal, then, is to suggest a framing philosophy for psychoanalysis that takes into account the process that we have described above pertaining to our capacity for self-transcendence. Let us take it that psychoanalysis of the kind associated with Freud and Jung take as their subject matter the varying interpretations possible of elemental symbols occurring in our dreams and in our free-floating fantasies and associations. Doran comments that "the disengagement of existential, interpersonal, and world-constitutive subjectivity as capable of objectivity in the realm, not of the true but of the good, provides the clearest instance of a relationship between these elemental symbols and the operative values of the person into whose psyche they are released from the neural manifold

that depth psychology calls the unconscious” (1990: 635). The transformation of psychoanalysis Doran suggests would place this within the context of an awareness of the “pneumapathology”, the distorted self-understanding, always possible because of the fragile nature of anyone’s negotiation of the dialectic to do with the duality of one’s knowing. In other words, there is needed the frame of intentionality analysis of the kind we have outlined above.

This can be understood by reflecting on what exactly constitutes the unity of the person. This is not to be identified with the spirit. The “I” always has to do with the tension between limitation and transcendence. Lonergan emphasizes that spirit and psyche are not one of them ‘I’ and the other ‘It’. “Both are I and neither is merely It. If my intelligence is mine, so is my sexuality. If my reasonableness is mine, so are my dreams.” (in Doran, 1990: 81) So getting to grips with one’s whole self is important, at the existential level, the level of taking charge of one’s own future development through one’s choices. What choices are available is dependent on the range of one’s feelings. Psychic conversion addresses the feeling dimension of one’s living. This dimension can be pointed to by noting the difference between what one thinks of oneself and one’s actual habitual responses to the world. One can point to how little one understands the images that occur in one’s dreams. Psychotherapy can aid the emergence of the existential subject by mediating a capacity to disengage the symbolic or imaginal constitution of the feelings by which values are apprehended. (Doran, 1994: 115). Conversion at the psychic level denotes “the emergence of the capacity to disengage the symbolic constitution of the feelings in which the primordial apprehension of values occur” (Doran, 1994: 219).

We want here to flesh this out in terms of getting to grips with one’s feelings about oneself. So the mediation of immediacy through language that Lonergan discusses, must be supplemented by or accompanied by a dispositional mediation (if one wants to term it that) through an intersubjective process. Our starting point is a non-perfect sense of self, and this is revealed in the question, How do you feel?, the question of *Befindlichkeit*.

Here is what Gendlin says about this: “Feeling’ is a word usually used for specific contents – for this or that feeling, emotion, or tone, for feeling good, or bad, or blue, or pretty fair. But regardless of the many changes in *what* we feel – that is to say, really, *how* we feel – there always is the concretely present flow of feeling. At any moment we can individually and privately direct our attention inward, and when we do that, there it is.... a concrete mass in the sense that it is ‘there’ for us. It is not at all vague in its being there. It may be vague only in that we may not know what it is. We can put only a few aspects of it into words.” (in Doran, 1994: 116)

The role of this felt meaning in our lives (what Gendlin refers to as “experiencing”) is enormous, and it is what crucially needs thematizing in our own scientific culture: “If our direct touch with our own personally important experiencing becomes too clouded, narrowed, or lost, we go to any length to regain it: we go to a friend, to a therapist, or to the desert. For nothing is as debilitating as a confused or distant functioning of experiencing.” Thus the malfunctioning of the psyche, its disharmony with spirit, needs to be confronted: neurotic need, refusal of change, rationalization, resentment, bias. This occurs mostly by dealing with symbols and our habitual symbol life. A symbol is described by Lonergan very simply, for these purposes, as “an image of a real or imagined object that evokes a feeling or is evoked by a feeling” (in Doran, 1994: 65). Affective development involves “a transvaluation and transformation of symbols. What before was moving no longer moves; what before did not move now is moving...symbols that do not submit to transvaluation and transformation seem to point to a block in development”(in Doran, 1994: 66).

The actually operative symbol life of the person needs to be consciously addressed, through the aid of another. For example, one may carry with one a primitive feeling charged image of “stranger”, or “father”, “mother”, “murderer”. To the extent these operate unconsciously they operate compulsively. Psychotherapy may be said to “release” the psychic energy in the sense of a more relaxed and flexible and helpful set of images through which one’s powers of attentiveness, intelligence, reflectiveness and deliberation may more easily operate in the actual intersubjective world in which these are called upon.

We can take as example the Oedipus complex. A complex is a problem of the ego resulting from delay of gratification, and can be good or bad according to how it is negotiated. The set of feelings of the growing child towards parents and being special in someone’s eyes, can be termed the Oedipus complex. Then we could suggest, with Symington in his discussion of Lonergan’s understanding of Freud, “A successful Oedipus process steers an individual beyond his or her parents toward fulfilling sexual and psychical companionship, whereas an unsuccessful Oedipus process leaves a permeating psychical residue of one’s parents as sexual objects” (Symington, 2006: 568-9).

There is a social dimension to these suggestions for psychoanalysis. Gendlin highlights the crucial importance of reorienting the emphasis in contemporary culture. The “chief malaise of our society, he says, is perhaps that it allows so little pause and gives so little specifying response and interpersonal communion to our experiencing, so that we must much of the time pretend that we are

only what we seem externally, and that our meanings are only the objective references and the logical meanings of our words” (in Doran, 1994: 116-7).

Here we have what might be called the transcendental significance of feelings, that they give us a first apprehension of possible values other than those we have explicated to ourselves (our self-image) and this initiates the process of raising further questions for deliberation (Doran, 1994: 62). But contemporary ethical debates refer overwhelmingly to vital values (for example health) and the values of social order. There is no framework for reflecting on the human agent, and the capacity for self-transcendence. By the same token cultural values are overlooked as an autonomous realm of goods to which one responds directly to the measure one finds them appealing. This creates a moral vacuum in the work place, no longer is there any notion of the dignity of one’s “vocation”. But Alisdair MacIntyre (1981: 181) has invoked the idea of the “internal goods” constitutive of any social practice, goods (such as justice in the case of the legal profession) which are regarded as of objective value by society in general. Such values can however be lost, they can come into conflict with the goods of the institution, distributed to each participant as an individual in according with the rules for promotion, reward, and so on, corresponding to the need to meet vital values. No social practice is immune from the danger of the latter goods overtaking the former, of the practice becoming corrupted, whether this is the legal profession or clinical psychology or any other. Character comes in here as the principle of resistance to this: one identifies one’s self with those internal goods. And character in this sense names the personal value of self-appropriation. Hence the importance of the values associated with personal growth and in particular the healing aspect we have discussed above. This, when seen in its ontological dimension, brings in the religious category of grace. It is therefore important for the sake of society that this dimension is also part of the public consciousness, so it may be fostered in an authentic way. If feelings are our first apprehensions of values, it is important that attention be paid to this part of our lives. It is a question of balancing the scale of our values, towards the more inclusive.⁷

These points help us respond to the point raised earlier by Richards. The feeling of retribution seems to be evoked by one’s participation in the good of the social order, which has been disturbed by the crime, and calls for some restoration of order. Clearly, this feeling has no *necessary* malice or ill-will attached to it, towards the perpetrator. In other words, it speaks to one part only of one’s range of feelings, responding to the value of social order. This means one can also find in one’s hierarchy of feelings a further appeal, namely to personal value, a more inclusive or foundational value. This initiates a sublation of the feeling of retribution by a response to the possibility of forgiveness, in accordance with the perception of the perpetrator as of value. In this, images to do with victimization

which block this insight, have to be transvalued, transformed. Evolutionary studies reveal something about such feelings, but evolutionary ethics fails to avert to the need to negotiate these emotions.

VI. Stages of Culture

The points made in this argument get their force from what I take has been a shift in the framing culture, in our thinking about ourselves, about science, ethics and religion and which I will summarize by way of conclusion. Lonergan speaks of shifts in the “control of meaning”, from a common sense control, to a control by theory (a theory of “man”, for example), to the framing of basic questions by appeal to the exigencies of “interiority”, exemplified by the method of retortion discussed above. In Stage One one answers to the question “Why do we ...?” simply by stating that “That is what we do” and theorizing is confined to proverbs and sayings. Appeal is to what has been done in the past. Stage Two is initiated through interaction with cultures and customs other than one’s own, so that the question naturally arises as to which is correct, and is answered by abstracting from particular instances by means of a theory which covers all cases. In refining moral ideas and moving away from myth the basic tool is the principle of propositional non-contradiction. In religion it is the epoch of standardization of doctrine and of demarcating the authoritative texts. Stage Three takes note of the difference between abstract theory and actual practice and thematizes this. Science now is seen not as describing the world but as applying to it, and it deals with probabilities not certainties. The basic principle is not propositional non-contradiction, nor is logic the basic science, but now one appeals to performative self-contradiction and basic to all theory is not logic (there are now seen to be many logics, ways of formalizing thought) but method: Lonergan for example orientates his book of philosophy in terms of a desire “to assist the reader in effecting a personal appropriation...”.

We can explore Stage Three further by considering Rahner’s understanding of self-transcendence. This notion brings to the fore the existential dimension of human living, and justifies religious categories not as added onto “natural” human categories, but of a piece with the latter. The very awakening to oneself as self-conscious and “spirit” (“as subject and person”) Rahner argues occurs, paradoxically, “in so far as he becomes conscious of himself as the product of what is radically foreign to him” (1975: 29; in Doran, 1990: 237). By saying that we understand our transcendence precisely in understanding how we are limited by our natural and human constraints, Rahner points to the way in which the findings of the natural and human sciences are to be taken. It is in discovering that the feeling of retribution, for example, is precisely not entirely “from oneself” but shows how one is caught up in pre-personal demands, that one is able to shift to a more reflective orientation and consequent behaviour. In other words, it is not the case that an insight such as this

implies one's moral intuitions are in general misleading: one is, rather, brought to a higher perspective by one's feeling for the truth, which acts as a demand on one. And it is through being in touch with such deeper levels of feeling that this shift can occur.

Stage Two consciousness fails to see this option. The moral point of view is reified. One thinks in terms of principles, and detailed casuistry is called upon to show how principles apply to particular cases. But one is blind to the possibility that the moral schema may conceal blocks to further personal growth, may be a rationalization. Jung spoke about the danger not simply of our structure of instincts undermining our self-consciously chosen path of moral value, but also of the danger that one may "so subordinate instinct to spirit that the most grotesque 'spiritual' combinations may arise out of what are undoubtedly biological happenings" (in Doran, 1994: 226). It is in Stage Three that this sort of mistaken self-transcendence is revealed for what it is. If then one means by "instinct" a relatively autonomous system of responses, and by "spirit" the normative structure of authentic living, then "psyche" can be used to refer to one's habitual feeling-response to the world. To what extent does one understand one's feelings? Can one's responses catch one unawares? What is needed is a greater synthesis of conscious and unconscious (or unobjectified) aspects of one's personality. Psyche is capable of either harmony or disharmony with instinct and spirit.

The shift from logic to method (the existential journey circumscribed by the norms describing one's self-appropriation as self-transcendence) is also one of turning to the problem not of what one is in one's essence but to how one actually grows as a person. This shift of emphasis leads one to consider the question how one feels. This can be explained as follows.

The Stage Two emphasis on propositional non-contradiction leaves out of the picture the existential subject, and what lies behind what the subject articulates, namely the quality of the subject's self-referring. In Stage Three it is easier to distinguish, for example in matters of religious belief, between the subject of the belief and what she intends, and the variously identified objects as the proper correlates of this intention. The latter can differ from culture to culture and individual to individual while it might be the case that so far as concerns the intention, a large measure of similarity can be found. Objective truth might be important but not as important as subjective truth.

This move is a matter of values. Stage Three places the focus more on giving an account that brings to the fore basic human values. And while intentionality analysis can make thematic the structure of a conversion in which one appropriates one's powers of deliberation, it remains rather lame in the absence of sufficient attention paid to one's feeling-life, *Befindlichkeit*. In Stage Three the theoretical

systems painstakingly constructed in the period of theory and logic, are put under a cloud of systematic suspicion: is not our system of social and economic arrangements biased towards hiding its underbelly, a systematic exploitation of the poor? Is this not precisely revealed by actual empirical studies? Does not our moral system, our sense of values, mask an underlying scotoma, a blind spot to our own hidden fears to do with our basic desires? Is this not revealed both through studies in evolutionary psychology as well as in psychoanalysis? The need for a rethink of how one frames ethical values is apparent, and for these purposes I have suggested the explanatory notion of human self-transcendence.⁸

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¹ See her article in Petersen, 2007: 117.

² It is written, he says, so as “to assist the reader in effecting a personal appropriation of the concrete, dynamic structure immanent and recurrently operative in his own cognitive activities” (xvii).

³ I take this as a refuting the idea that we can have moral values but be unaware of them, as suggested by the evolutionary moral realist theory of Collier and Stingl (no date), or rather that moral values can operate as such without reference to the quality of our sense of responsibility. “Moral values, they write, may exist independently of any particular species’ ability to perceive them or be effected by them.”

⁴ Lonergan’s own very useful summary of his architectonic work, *Insight. A Study of Human Understanding*, is his essay, “Cognitive Structure” (Lonergan, 1988).

⁵ A typical example would be the textbook by Michael Murray and Michael Rea, *An Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2008). The attributes of God – independence, goodness, power, eternity, knowledge and providence – are the starting point for the discussion. But the properly religious context for discussion of god or gods would seem to be human need. The systematization of the notion of god is a later step in the religious traditions and is a response to the influence of the emergence of the control of thought by theory that was initiated in particular by the Greek philosophical tradition. But the focus often bypassed the existential origins of religious faith, the notion of god answering to a predicament of persons, and the compulsive descent into the self-stultifying absolutizing of some finite object or goal. We could also examine the role played by Analytic philosophy in continuing this trend in the philosophy of religion (Harris and Insole, 2005). Analytic philosophy, insofar as it focuses on conceptual analysis, prescind from the question of truth. It begins with “our” concept of god, and attempts to examine its coherence. But coherence makes no sense unless framed within the proper context in which the idea arose. This is clear from anthropological studies of what may be termed primitive religious beliefs.

⁶ John Haught points out that an evolutionary perspective clears the way for a much more open-ended view of the universe than was previously the case. From an ethical point of view the universe seen in an evolutionary perspective might seem heartless, indifferent to the weak, “its pitiless experimentation” being inappropriate as a model for human conduct (2000: 130). On the other hand we can very well see and appreciate the overarching aesthetics of the evolving universe. By this he understands the harmony of contrasts in which an excess of discord always threatens to overpower the orderly nature of things but never quite does so. This form and dynamics is the very definition of beauty, and can be appreciated by us. I reinterpret this point of Haught about the “evolutionary straining towards an intensification of beauty” to suggest not so much a universe hostile to ethics as one that allows us to flourish as self-creating beings in accordance with a template we ourselves have made out of the material we are given. The evolving universe is seen to lend support to the creativity of each individual person who makes their life into a work of art, moulds it through their particular unique response to what is dealt them in life. In this aspect, one appreciates the support of the universe, a matter of beauty, which can transcend in meaning even the eventual physical disappearance of the universe.

⁷ This section is built on the account of the integral scale of values outlined by Lonergan (1972) and further developed by Doran (1990, Chapter 4).

⁸ Again, it is John Haught who draws out the implications of this new awareness for a healthy future ethics framed by a religious perspective. We move away, in Stage Three, from thinking of creation as having occurred perfectly in the temporal beginning, and hence from conceiving of the job of religion as having to account for the falling away from this perfection. “Our myths and religions are full of scapegoating quests for victims to sacrifice for the sake of restoring some imagined lost world of perfection. And our human obsession with redressing the origin of evil leads easily to an equally compulsive need in our spiritual lives to make repetitive acts of reparation for our own alleged complicity in spoiling in what we have taken to be an *initial* perfection.” (2000: 141) This also leads to expiatory violence. All this can now be replaced. “Genuine hope for the future can survive only in a universe that forbids perpetually repeated reparations for the loss of a timeless primordial perfection” (2000: 142). Our spirituality can now be one of promise, of creative contribution to something truly new.