

The Human Spirit and Its Appropriation

Ethics, Psyche, and Religious Symbology in the Context of Evolution

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Abstract

The reductionist conclusions of some evolutionary theorists are countered by appealing to the transformation of feeling-traces from our evolutionary origins. Presupposed to the science of evolutionary biology is the capacity to get at the truth of things, and to live by values, which Rahner terms “spirit”; its appropriation comes about through the process of moral and intellectual “conversion” (Lonergan), extended into the realm of feelings and the psyche (Doran). This allows a non-supernaturalistic way of understanding the saving interpersonal transaction at the heart of Christian belief; framed as a personal journey, it implies a less conceptual and more imaginal approach to faith.

Keywords

evolutionary ethics – reductionism – religious symbology – Bernard Lonergan – psychic conversion – Robert Doran – Karl Rahner

1 Introduction

The paper links evolution with human consciousness and with the Christian religion.¹ The articulation of faith in God in our own context takes place against the tendency to reductionism that has accompanied the idea of evolution. Our response is to draw out the self-understanding of the scientist, as able to get to

1 A much earlier version of the ideas in this paper was given at the South African Science and Religion Forum held at the University of South Africa in September 2015, with the theme, “Creation, Consciousness and Christology: evolutionary perspectives.”

the truth of things, to some extent, and to live by values, *presupposed to* all scientific inquiry, including that of evolutionary biology. Human knowledge has a personal dimension, which can be framed in terms of a development or journey, in terms of self-transcendence. In addition, this insight relativises the place given to Christian dogma by a greater appreciation of the role of symbols in religious faith in any person's journey. This suggests a development beyond the Hellenistic Christianity that emerged from the original Palestinian tradition.²

Giving support to this move, I mention here at the start Jung's remarks about the importance of retaining symbols as a properly autonomous dimension of our self-understanding. Jung writes:

We all have an understandable desire for crystal clarity, but we are apt to forget that in psychic matters we are dealing with processes of experience, that is, with transformations which should never be given hard and fast names if their living movement is not to petrify into something static. The protean mythologeme and shimmering symbol express the processes of the psyche far more trenchantly and, in the end, far more clearly than the clearest concept; for the symbol not only conveys a visualization of the process but ... also brings a re-experiencing of it, of that twilight which we can learn to understand only through inoffensive empathy, but which too much clarity dispels.³

I start by drawing on Karl Rahner's understanding of human nature in terms of "spirit," developed in his monograph *Hominisation*,⁴ and in part as a response to the default reductionism that has accompanied the shift from a dual world of spirit alongside matter, to a unitary, developing universe. All present events, it has been suggested, including our ideas about how to live our lives and make sense of the universe, are perhaps encoded in the universe at the moment of the Big Bang, thus undermining any autonomous causality we might, archaically,

2 This is more or less the direction also taken by Lutheran French philosopher François Laruelle in his prodigiously obscure and highly polemical *Christo-Fiction. The Ruins of Athens and Jerusalem*, trans. Robin Mackay, *Insurrections: Critical Studies in Religion, Politics, and Culture* (New York, NY; Chichester: Columbia University Press, 2015). But Laruelle rejects the possibility of any proper philosophical grounding for what he terms a "fictional but faithful" contemporary account of Christ.

3 Quoted in Robert M. Doran, *Subject and Psyche*, Marquette Studies in Theology 3, 2nd ed. (Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 1994), 157.

4 Karl Rahner, *Hominisation. The Evolutionary Origin of Man as a Theological Problem* (New York, NY: Herder and Herder, 1965).

still ascribe to moral and religious ideas and forces. But Rahner questions the *obviousness* of “material phenomena,” and hence of any reductionist assumptions. He sets out carefully what is, he argues, a prior item of knowledge, namely self-knowledge, objectifying ourselves to ourselves, seeing ourselves over against a world that we have made into an object to be dealt with.⁵

The reductionist assumption is furthermore brilliantly taken apart by Bernard Lonergan's cognitional theory, who shows it to be a mistake that seems unavoidable given our need to deal immediately with what confronts us, so that what does not confront us immediately we do not give the status of “reality” in the sense of “worthwhile bothering about.” It is the kind of attitude of the cat that knows that this on the floor beneath the table is a bowl of milk. But besides this knowing there is also the kind of knowing that comes through asking questions about how things really are, through insight into the data of our senses, and through reflective judgment as to the probable, or improbable, accuracy of that insight in the light of the data available. Objectivity, in this case, arises out of not simply looking at what is there to be looked at but also by questioning how things fit together, by applying one's mind, by allowing insights to come to one, by refraining from jumping to conclusions. Objectivity is the fruit of authentic subjectivity. And *reality* must include not only objects “out there” but also, of course, the kind of being (ourselves) that can know, through judgment, what is most probably really there. Finally, part of being responsible is to break this duality of knowing – a process Lonergan calls intellectual conversion. Furthermore Lonergan outlines a *moral* conversion in which one begins to distinguish what is of true value from what is simply desirable.⁶

The notion of growing as an authentic subject, through such crucial developmental moments, seems to me to be a good foundation for an ethics. However, it is a notion that “evolutionary ethics” tends to undermine. If at the level of our basic orientation in the world we are ineluctably plugged into the survival mechanisms of our species, then it is likely that our ethics and our religion are

5 I apply Rahner's argument to the particular case of Darwinian or biological evolution, as will be seen. But it could equally lend support, although I am not here concerned to argue this, to a non-reductionist understanding of cosmic evolution in terms of levels of complexity, from energy fields to patternings of social behaviour, each with its own characteristics and regularities.

6 On the mistaken view of objectivity, see Lonergan's summary in his essay “Cognitional Structure,” in Bernard Lonergan, *Collection*, Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan 4 (ed. Frederick C. Crowe and Robert M. Doran; Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988), 205–221, esp. 214–219. On intellectual and moral conversion, see Bernard Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 2nd ed. (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1973), chapter 10.

simply products of a false consciousness. Such a false consciousness – something like wishful thinking – might very well have evolutionary value. We have then to show that at the level of our most basic reacting to our environment, the level of our feelings, we can grow in our ability to live a life of the spirit. This is what Robert Doran, a pupil of Lonergan, calls psychic conversion.⁷

To summarise, my paper responds to the reductionist idea accompanying an evolutionary worldview by tracing the idea of spirit in Rahner; I focus in particular on the oversights of a reductionist “evolutionary ethics.” I then continue by unpacking the process of “conversion,” outlined by Lonergan, of breaking the duality in human knowing and in acting associated with the appropriation of spirit; and by extending this idea into the realm of feelings and the psyche, the process Doran terms the mediation of dispositional immediacy. I draw attention, finally, to the way in which clarifying how an evolutionary thought-framework gives a particular direction to any future articulation of the Christian faith.

The discussion of psychic conversion is key to the paper. Doran brings in the existential quality of one’s dispositional immediacy, of how one feels, the idea of *Befindlichkeit*. The ambivalence in one’s attitude to one’s feelings calls for a resolution that indicates a turn to the other, which can be framed in terms of intersubjective transactions as found in psychoanalysis. It cannot be that our feelings are determined in biological categories alone: we have feelings not just about what satisfies us or not, but about values too. Certain helpful and certain unhelpful feelings can be identified through studies in evolutionary biology. There is a personal growth that is called for in negotiating this complex of feelings attaching to our evolutionary nature.

2 Matter, Spirit, and Divine Action in the Context of Evolution

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.”⁸ 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

7 Doran, *Subject and Psyche*, and Robert M. Doran, *Theology and the Dialectics of History*, Heritage (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990).

8 Rahner, *Hominisation*, 47.

“matter” might be. Rahner uses the term “spirit” to refer to the capacity for transcendental experience; we can think of this in terms of 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.”⁹

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.¹⁰ 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 symbolising our awe in the face of death, ceremoniously burying the dead.

But we cannot 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 cannot 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.¹¹

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 demythologised 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

9 Rahner, *Hominisation*, 52.

10 Rahner, *Hominisation*, 62.

11 Rahner, *Hominisation*, 75.

immediate cause. But we could less misleadingly say that the capacity for self-transcendence (traditionally, the soul) is there in finite being, and the parents beget not a material body but a human being. So if the 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.”¹²

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.” 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.”¹³

The implication for Christology is also apparent: if “the parents procreate the human being in its unity,”¹⁴ and if Jesus is a human being, then must we not say that his parents begat him, dropping the dogmatic expressions no longer making sense in an evolutionary framework.

This is also 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 argue below more fully.

3 Reductionism in Evolutionary Ethics

Evolutionary ethics shows how our moral motivations have their genesis in the mechanisms and survival strategies of the species. Biological categories are seen to be sufficient to explain human behaviour without remainder, by means of a mechanism, as Radcliffe Richards puts it, “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

¹² Rahner, *Hominisation*, 99.

¹³ Rahner, *Hominisation*, 106.

¹⁴ Rahner, *Hominisation*, 99.

Being.”¹⁵ After Darwin, we realise how Locke was mistaken, as Dennett argues in his *Darwin’s Dangerous Idea*: “If mindless evolution could account for the breathtakingly clever artefacts of the biosphere, how could the products of our own ‘real’ minds be exempt from an evolutionary explanation?” Moreover, this dissolves, he says, “the illusion of our own authorship, our own divine spark of creativity and understanding.”¹⁶

But this seems to be false, shown by the counter example of Dennett’s own consciously intelligent action in responsibly putting forward what he implies is a reasonable hypothesis. Anticipating our Lonergan-type argument below, we can note that on his own implicit assumption, this action of Dennett’s can only be properly explained in terms of such responsibility. His putting forward of a hypothesis adheres to standards and norms of 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. His action can only be taken in terms of him aiming at these standards or norms. And, this implies a human power or capacity to do this, a “spark of creativity and understanding.” The proper explanatory category for such an event is that of aim or purpose. 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 such an aim or purpose. One analyses it under the category of normative responsible action. A concept of biological inquiry that concluded to the absence of any such possibility of this would seem to undermine itself.

Be that as it may, the dominant view is that moral values are not real. Radcliffe Richards for example 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 retribution.¹⁷ We can then see that the moral order is simply what we construct. 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. In his own contribution to the debate, in 1986, Michael Ruse called these mechanisms “epigenetic rules.” But, he contended, the notion that altruism is of genuine or objective value, is “a collective illusion foisted on us by our genes.” In a similar vein to Radcliffe Richards, he pointed to a lack of any autonomous moral

15 Janet Radcliffe Richards, *Human Nature after Darwin. A Philosophical Introduction* (Abingdon; New York, NY: Routledge, 2000), 17.

16 Quoted in Radcliffe Richards, *Human Nature*, 22.

17 In her contribution to Thomas S. Petersen and Jesper Ryberg, eds., *Normative Ethics. Five Questions* (London: Automatic Press, 2007), esp. 117.

reasoning. After all, he remarked, “why should I care whether you are upset at my stealing your food and clothing?”¹⁸ More recently, the popular writer Steven Pinker has added that from an evolutionist’s perspective, “there is far too much morality” and not enough attention paid to the scientific facts about human happiness.¹⁹ Radcliffe Richards argues that nature does not prescribe how we ought to act, and, in point of fact, our “natural” feelings – the example we mentioned above is the feeling of the need for retribution – can be misleading.²⁰

In contrast to these points of view, John Collier and Michael Stingl²¹ argue for “evolutionary moral realism”: we should care about fairness and the like; we “ignore them at our peril.”²² Moral values are adaptive; they have a to-be-pursued character. In response to this, one could point to Ruse’s rhetorical question, pointing to 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. Collier and Stingl want to argue that moral values are not simply human “constructs,” but real or objective, “a real part of the environment in which social and intelligent creatures evolved.”²³ However, “real” is restricted in their understanding, as they explain in a footnote,²⁴ to “factors figuring in the biological story” and it is upon these that moral values hang. What is missed here is that *presupposed* to biology (or any scientific inquiry) is the (real!) capacity to judge some conception of how things are as probably, or possibly, true – and similarly some supposedly desirable course of action as truly of value or possibly not. The biological story necessarily prescind from accounting for this human capacity, and hence biological ethics fails to see how the psyche can negotiate between conflicting instincts, or integrate them. Just as “fairness” or something like it might, as shown by Collier and Stingl,²⁵ be verified behaviourally in capuchin monkeys, so too “retribution.” For Collier and Stingl, moral objectivity refers to values existing “out there” as identified in biol-

18 Michael Ruse, *Taking Darwin Seriously. A Naturalistic Approach to Philosophy* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986), 253.

19 Steven Pinker, *The Better Angels of our Nature: Why Violence has Declined* (New York, NY: Penguin, 2011), 751.

20 Radcliffe Richards, *Human Nature*, 242.

21 John Collier and Michael Stingl, “Evolutionary Moral Realism,” *Biological Theory* 7, no. 3 (2012): 218–226, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13752-012-0067-x>.

22 Collier and Stingl, “Evolutionary Moral Realism,” 219.

23 Collier and Stingl, “Evolutionary Moral Realism,” 218.

24 Collier and Stingl, “Evolutionary Moral Realism,” 221.

25 Collier and Stingl, “Evolutionary Moral Realism,” 220.

ogy, existing “independently of any particular species’ ability to perceive them or be affected by them.”²⁶ In our own account, moral values are the correlate of responsibility, and objectivity is the fruit of an authentic subjectivity.

Furthermore, 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. This implies, on the positive side, as I argue below, that the insight we have from evolutionary biology 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-levelled 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.

To summarise, I have begun from 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 present the idea that all knowledge has a personal dimension, a developmental aspect, 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 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, 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

26 Collier and Stingl, “Evolutionary Moral Realism,” 219.

account of contemporary ethics, *After Virtue*.²⁷ 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.

4 Intellectual and Moral Conversion

The technical term for the kind of philosophical argument 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*, Bernard 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 ...”²⁸ 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? Elsewhere 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.”²⁹

Furthermore, while the natural sciences posit a horizon of possible objects which change without affecting any change in the observer, in the case of philo-

27 Alisdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue. A Study in Moral Theory* (London: Duckworth, 1981), 29.

28 Bernard Lonergan, *Insight. A Study of Human Understanding*, 3rd ed. (New York, NY: Philosophical Library, 1970), xix.

29 Lonergan, *Method*, 21.

sophical 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 fulfill these conditions of being human persons, we also achieve self-transcendence, both in the field of knowledge and in the field of action.³⁰

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 this distinction is a moment of "conversion."³¹ 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.

Parallel to this we can note the contemporary discussion of moral values in the absence of a proper analysis of personal growth and the motivational

30 Bernard Lonergan, *Philosophical and Theological Papers 1958–1964*, ed. Robert C. Croken, Frederick E. Crowe, and Robert M. Doran, *Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan* 6 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996), 319, emphases added.

31 Lonergan, *Method*, 238–239.

structure of the person. The “ought” is discussed as a dimension which takes off from a starting point which is distinguished from the “is.” It is true that Collier and Stingl, and others, take the facts of our nature into consideration, but they restrict these to the realm of biology. But, it is when one realises 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.³² 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. What evolutionary ethics demonstrates is a forgetfulness of the subject, and this is accompanied by a neglect of attending to our feelings. 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.

5 Mediation of Dispositional Immediacy

The story we have told posits a natural dynamism towards growth in our capacity for self-transcendence. This involves, through intellectual and moral conversion, breaking the duality in our knowing and in our willing. However, how are we to negotiate the complex of feelings attaching to our evolutionary nature? Which feelings are we to affirm and which inhibit? In his well-developed description of the predicament, Augustine Shutte points to the difficulty in acquiring greater self-knowledge without the prior breadth of willingness; and the quality of my willingness depends in turn on understanding its importance in my life – which as yet I do not.³³ His solution is to show a way of opening up to one’s most central desires, desires by nature. But – here I refer to a critic of Shutte – have not evolutionary studies pointed to the *moral ambivalence* of our desires by nature?

32 Are there such conditions, as claimed here, in an objective sense? It might seem (as pointed out by an anonymous referee) that evolutionary hermeneutics casts suspicion on any supposed “human essence” but what is here affirmed is rather the objective possibility of any person’s *growth* in self-knowledge and integrity of will, which possibility I take as brought into focus *precisely by* an evolutionary framework. And that recalibrates both ethics and how religious doctrine is understood, as argued below.

33 Augustine Shutte, “A New Argument for the Existence of God,” *Modern Theology* 3, no. 2 (1987): 157–177, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-0025.1987.tb00133.x>; idem, *Philosophy for Africa* (Cape Town: University of Cape Town, 1993), chapter 7.

Shutte explains:

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.

In addition, 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.³⁴

I am not truly open to the project of personal growth.

Because of this impasse in personal growth,³⁵ 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 that are ordered in a more integrated way: my blocks apply less to him. In addition, 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 has argued that psychoanalysis as practiced does not of course always see itself in this way.³⁶ In point of fact, what might be revealed to the

34 Shutte, *Philosophy for Africa*, 83.

35 This is not to deny the influence here of the interplay between reptile brain, limbic and prefrontal system, a complex of factors again pointed to by an anonymous referee. The argument, however, is that whatever the conditioning factors, in the final analysis agency is a matter of acting back on oneself, not something that could be picked up by any science, whose procedure *presupposes* this capacity to self-reiterate, to reflect back on and judge the relative accuracy of one's hypotheses. Any person's understanding of the block in willingness here at stake is only achieved (in contrast to increased knowledge of *those* factors) as an existential shock and awakened self-awareness, that is to say, not without a feeling component. The implications of this are important to explore, as I do here, using the example of feeling "hurt".

36 Michael Martin, "On a New Argument for the Existence of God," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 28, no. 1 (1990): 25–34, <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF00141871>.

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. Doran’s proposal, then, is to suggest a framing philosophy for a critical psychoanalysis that takes into account the process that we have described above pertaining to our natural capacity for self-transcendence. This then will answer to Martin’s objection: by throwing light on our deep desire by nature to become ourselves, our shallow desires are precisely re-ordered through the process of this achievement of a new insight into ourselves.

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.”³⁷ The transformation of psychoanalysis Doran suggests would place this within the context of an awareness of the “pneumapathology,” that is, of 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 emphasises 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.”³⁸ 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 dimen-

37 Doran, *Theology*, 635.

38 Lonergan, *Insight*, 474; quoted in Doran, *Theology*, 81.

sion 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.³⁹ 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."⁴⁰

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*.⁴¹

Eugene Gendlin's comments on this are worth recalling:

"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. However, 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.⁴²

The role of this felt meaning in our lives (what Gendlin refers to as "experiencing") is enormous, and it is what crucially needs thematising in our own scientific culture: "If our direct touch with our own personally important expe-

39 Doran, *Subject and Psyche*, 115.

40 Doran, *Subject and Psyche*, 219.

41 The neglect of this "being in touch with oneself" is perhaps the origin of certain phenomenologists' turn to "touch" as more central than sight or intellect. See Richard Kearney, "The Wager of Carnal Hermeneutics," in *Carnal Hermeneutics*, ed. Richard Kearney and Brian Treanor, Perspectives in Continental Philosophy (New York, NY: Fordham University Press, 2015), 15–56.

42 Eugene T. Gendlin, *Experiencing and the Creation of Meaning. A Philosophical and Psychological Approach to the Subjective* (Glencoe, IL: Free Press of Glencoe, 1962); quoted in Doran, *Subject and Psyche*, 116.

riencing 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, rationalisation, 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.”⁴³ 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.”⁴⁴

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 not only of dragon, snake, or saving redeeming child, but more prosaically of stranger, father, mother, or 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 Patrick Symington⁴⁵ 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.”⁴⁶

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

43 Quoted in Doran, *Subject and Psyche*, 65.

44 Doran, *Subject and Psyche*, 66.

45 Paul Symington, “The Unconscious and Conscious Self: The Nature of Psychical Unity in Freud and Lonergan,” *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 80, no. 4 (2006): 563–580, <https://doi.org/10.5840/acpq200680417>.

46 Symington, “The Unconscious and Conscious Self,” 568–569.

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."⁴⁷

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.⁴⁸ However, contemporary ethical debates refer overwhelmingly to vital values (for example health and wealth) and the values of social order without proper consideration of the foundation of such order in self-transcending persons, persons with developed dispositions to the good. 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.⁴⁹

These points help us respond to the point raised earlier in the context of evolutionary ethics. 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 victimisation that 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.

47 Quoted in Doran, *Subject and Psyche*, 116–117.

48 Doran, *Subject and Psyche*, 62.

49 This section is built on the account of the integral scale of values outlined by Lonergan, *Method*, chapter 2, and further developed by Doran, *Theology*, chapter 4.

6 The Project of Christian Doctrine

The points made in this argument – to do with spirit and its appropriation – in response to the reductionism accompanying an evolutionary framework for thought get their force from what I take has been a shift in the way our culture *frames* its ideas – about science, about ethics, and about religion.⁵⁰ The setting for evolutionary thought is the shift from a concern for theory to one, as Lonergan puts it, focused on assisting a personal appropriation *of* the theory. Rahner's understanding of self-transcendence is illustrative. This notion of humanity makes explicit the developmental aspect, the existential dimension of human living, and justifies religious and moral categories not as an essence imposed onto "natural" human categories, *but of a piece* with the latter. The very awakening of a person to themselves 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."⁵¹ 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 *embraced* by an evolutionary consciousness. 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. Moreover, it is through being in touch with such deeper levels of feeling that this shift can occur.

In this approach one is aware how any moral schema may conceal blocks to further personal growth, may be a rationalisation. 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."⁵² If then one means by "instinct" a relatively autonomous system of responses, and by "spirit" the normative structure of authentic living, then "psyche" (one's habitual feeling-response to the world) needs to be invoked to mediate the other two. To what

50 Cf. Lonergan, *Method*, 85–100.

51 Karl Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith*, trans. William V. Dych (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1978), 29; quoted in Doran, *Theology*, 237.

52 Quoted in Doran, *Subject and Psyche*, 226.

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.

So far as concerns religious belief this approach invites a distinction between the one doing the believing (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 a shift in values. The theoretical systems painstakingly constructed in an earlier period – including long-held formulations about the nature of God's self-communication in human persons, in Jesus – are now put under a cloud of systematic suspicion.⁵³ Moreover, while Lonergan and others have made 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*. We have tried to capture something of what makes for a healing interpersonal transaction, in a way that could make more sense in our culture of Jesus's power in human history. The importance of life-transforming symbols operative in one's imagination will now be seen to be crucial, and help to moderate an unhelpful "essentialist" approach, for example to the doctrine of the Resurrection.

I can end with one theologian's attentiveness to this imaginal dimension of faith. In his well-known reflection on the creed, *Credo*, Hans Küng applies his reason to rethink Christian doctrine for a scientific and secular culture – but accompanies his discussion of each item in the creed by a heartfelt response to a classic work of art depicting the meaning of this. Here he is on the Resurrection. It is Grünewald's *Resurrection* (Isenheim Altar) he is describing.

What inner radiance there is in the colours that shine from it! The resurrection is depicted as a cosmic event, ... against the black night sky with a few shining stars. In a powerful surge the risen Christ is soaring with arms uplifted, taking the white gravecloth with him, surrounded by an enormous radiance of light which turns into the colour of the rainbow and changes the cloth first into blue, then into violet, and in the centre

53 See also John F. Haught, *God after Darwin. A Theology of Evolution* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2000), 141–142, picking up on the potential of an evolutionary framework to free us from a static and reified series of thoughts about God's original perfect creation.

into flaming red and yellow. What a symphony of colours! And that is the unique thing about this Easter picture: an unusual degree of spiritualization is achieved, and yet the body of the transfigured Christ remains clearly visible: the person of the risen Christ does not dissolve but remains unmistakably a concrete figure, a definite person. The wound marks on the alabastine body and the scarlet mouth recall that this is none other than the crucified Christ who – with the gesture of blessing and revelation – is entering the sphere of pure light. The face of the risen Christ, right in the centre, sunny, with an inner radiance, goes over into the blinding yellow of the aureole, which is like a sun. And though the outlines of the face are blurred by the shining light, with great tranquillity a pair of eyes look toward the beholder with gentle authority and reconciling grace.⁵⁴

Küng concludes by praising Grünewald's achievement of "indicating in colour what cannot really be painted, the *soma pneumatikon*, spiritual body of the risen Christ ..." We have here an indication of Küng's passionate faith in the meaning we can give to death, a meaning that would be inappropriately described as merely subjective. It gives force to Jung's argument, mentioned at the start of this essay, about the autonomous role of the imaginal in our understanding of ourselves. It is this re-situating of Christian ideas, not, finally, subject to precise and once-and-for-all conceptual expression, that we can take as implied in an evolutionary framework for thought.

7 Conclusion

I have argued that an evolutionary context forces a shift in emphasis in how we think of religious faith, from objective doctrinal formulations to a more subjective attitude affirming one's developing self-understanding and growth. (This is a shift already signalled in the prophets of the Hebrew tradition and in the Christian Reformation, and also, indeed, in the many strands of the so-called Axial Age, 800–200 BCE, in the major world religions, well described by Karen Armstrong.⁵⁵) I have suggested, following Karl Rahner, the idea of spirit as interpretive key to human behaviour understood in the context of an evolutionary world-view, and in response to reductionist accounts. The latter biologist story of evolutionary ethics, whatever its insights, prescinds from accounting for the

54 Hans Küng, *Credo. The Apostles' Creed Explained for Today* (London: SCM, 1992), 96.

55 Karen Armstrong, *The Great Transformation* (New York, NY: Anchor Books, 2007).

human capacity to know how things really are, and to act on our understanding of value, since this is presupposed to any scientific inquiry. Nonetheless, in an evolutionary context such capacities have to be unpacked in terms of how our dispositional feeling-responses attaching to our biological nature may be transformed.

Our jumping-off point was Lonergan's phenomenology of the duality in our human knowing, oscillating between the world of immediacy marked by biological needs and the world mediated by an open-ended horizon of meaning (ideas, values). Lonergan's prescriptive breaking of this duality, we saw, is described as a moment of growth, securing a greater appropriation of one's nature as spirit. This account, it was argued, needs to be extended to take into account the problem of negotiating the complex of feelings characterising our existential condition. Feelings can respond to biological needs but we also have feelings about what we hold to be of true value or worth. Which feelings are we going to consent to? This is the problem of the quality of our willingness, well described in terms of a fundamental human predicament (Shutte), a juxtaposition of inadequate self-understanding and insufficiently critical habits of choice. Action follows understanding but greater understanding is built on an open heart, a breadth of willingness impossible of achievement without such self-understanding of one's true, humanly central desires. The impasse is broken, we argued, through intersubjective transactions facilitated by the beneficial other, or others, endowed with greater self-understanding and integrity of self-affirmation. Parallels were drawn with the transaction between therapist and patient in psychoanalysis but for our purposes this needs to be framed by a strictly philosophical account of how the dialectic of psyche and spirit may be unpacked.

This account assumes, contrary to evolutionary ethics, that the most fundamental desires we have by virtue of our human nature (explained in the meta-science story given above) are trustworthy. It is reasonable then to place our hope in the liberating effect of those intersubjective transactions initiated by beneficial others to which finally we cannot but assent. This gives us a way of making sense in our secularised culture of Jesus's power in human history, and relativises a doctrinal approach to the Christian faith in favour of a variety of life-transforming symbols operating so as to refurbish and heal the imagination. We took as our guide to this Robert Doran, concerned to outline how one may disengage the symbolic construction of feelings in which the crucial apprehension of values occurs. And this focus will also imply a shift in emphasis in how one thinks of and expresses religious faith, from an essentialist to a more explicitly existentialist set of ideas.

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