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Introduction

We do a lot of talking about values. In our vision or mission statements we formulate the priorities by which we will act and decide for the future. We talk about gospel values, Spiritan values, democratic values, economic values, American values, family values, personal values, and the like. Talking of values is part of our political discourse, our moral discourse and our theological and congregational discussions. We use the word every day. We consider our values a central aspect of who we are and what we stand for. Values are the foundation for our priorities, our mission and our actions.

Yet in contrast to all the talk about values, we have almost complete silence in terms of a discussion on what are values, where do they come from, how do you distinguish between true and false values, what is the difference between values and feelings, how do you teach values. Why do we talk about moral values rather than moral laws or virtues and vices? The philosophical and theological tradition has discussed at length the morality of right and wrong based on the natural law tradition or based on the virtue ethics tradition. However, the language of values has now crept into our discourse. Marx started talking about values in economic terms. Nietzsche undermined traditional moral values but also wrote about transvaluation of values in a rather unorthodox sense. In the first half of the twentieth century the phenomenologists, Max Scheler, Nicholai Hartmann, Dietrich von Hildebrand, and others devoted some efforts to defining values but the tradition has not been continued. For the last sixty years, Lonergan is the only philosopher or theologian that I know of who has given some theoretical account of what values are and where they come from.¹

It is not surprising then that there is considerable confusion as to what a value is and whether we can know the difference between true and false values. Alasdair MacIntyre asserts that the most prevalent view of values in our present culture is emotivism, namely, “that all evaluative judgments and more specifically all moral judgments are nothing but expressions of preference, expressions of attitude or feeling, insofar as they are moral or evaluative in character.”² He goes on to say that such expressions of feeling are neither true nor false as the category of true or false does not apply to feelings. This attitude is indeed very common.

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It is common to think of values as personal preferences, as arbitrary, as irrational, as relativistic, as incommensurable, as beyond the scope of rational argument. If this were really so it would lead to chaos. But this would seem to fly in the face of the fact that we are evaluating, thinking and arguing about values all the time and do strongly hold some values to be good and the contrary to be evil. I think we can and must make some attempt to defend the soundness of value judgments that underpin our priorities and our actions.

What is the best way to do that? Lonergan’s innovation in *Insight* was simply to attend to the activities of understanding as they occur in fact in consciousness. From this method follows everything else. Cognitional theory, epistemology and metaphysics are based on the facts of how we come to know. Can we do the same in ethics? Why not! Attend to the process of evaluation, describe its emergence, components and causes, distinguish evaluating in various spheres, and note how we discriminate between good evaluating and bad evaluating. This is what we plan to do in this short paper. We will carefully attend to the process of evaluating. We will identify the three components of cognitive, affective and volitional as they unite in a value judgment. We will discover that the process is legitimate and justifies our dealing with policies and morals in terms of values.

**The Process of Evaluating**

Whenever we use expressions such as good, better, best, or bad, worse, worst, we are engaged in the process of evaluating. We evaluate things, we evaluate people, we evaluate policies, actions, food, climate, books: we are evaluating all the time. We can do it well or badly, carefully or rashly, explicitly or implicitly. We seem to have an innate ability to evaluate and deliberate. The process seems to start with a question, is it worthwhile? Is this good or bad? We consider the alternatives, the arguments, the pros and cons, the consequences, the feelings involved, the dangers, the fears, the demands. The process seems to come to a conclusion in a judgment of value: this is the best thing to do and there follows the implementation in a course of action.

Lonergan’s treatment of values builds on his earlier work on judgments of truth. In *Insight* he elaborated a cognitional structure of three levels of activities: of experiencing, understanding and judging. It is a brilliant, detailed description of how we actually come to know. It sums up in a neat formula the investigations of epistemology since the time of Aristotle. Finally, we have an answer to the question of what is truth in terms of how we
actually make a correct judgment of truth. Truth is what you find when you have examined all the evidence, grasped the connection between the evidence and the conclusion, no further relevant questions arise, and you posit a judgment. Lonergan later came to realize that there is a fourth level of activities involved in knowing good and evil. We usually do not stop when we have discovered a truth, a scientific breakthrough, a pure theory. A new discovery or insight almost inevitably leads to the question of what are you going to do about it, what are its implications, what is its worth, how can it be applied, how can science be implemented in technology. If climate science is correct in diagnosing and predicting climate catastrophe, then certain courses of action are called for. They are good if they alleviate the situation, bad if they make it worse. Science does not end in pure truth but in the implications, the applications, the changes in human behavior that are called for. Questions for truth are followed by questions of value. There are practical implications from most discoveries in science and philosophy and so cognitional structure needs to be completed with an elaboration of the question of value, the deliberative insight and the judgment of value.

What is this process of evaluating? Perhaps a simple, concrete example of this process might help. Note the activities of questioning, deliberating and concluding which are always present. Consider the mental activities we engage in when we set out to buy a new mobile phone. Intelligence is obviously involved: we ask, where can I buy one, why do I need one, what functions does it perform, how much does it cost, where can I get the best bargain? These are questions of information, understanding and judgments of truth and value. Are feelings involved? We see our friends using mobile phones and we want one. We desire, we want, we need, we aspire to be connected at all times. We like one color and not another, we admire some functions and detest some annoyances. We are comfortable with our choice or uneasy. We can perform these activities well and get a good phone that satisfies our needs at a good price and we are happy ever after. Or we perform the activities badly, do not match needs to functions, and end up returning the phone within a week. Identifying the activities in the process of buying a mobile phone is helpful because the same process and activities are involved in the more difficult judgments of moral value. Already we can see that knowing and feeling are involved. Already we can see that there is a process of deliberating, with a beginning in the question, a middle in the evaluation and a satisfying end in the judgment of value.
Underpinning the activities we can also perceive the cognitive, the affective and the volitional elements. Most obvious is the cognitive element. We ask questions, we seek information, we compare prices, we learn about apps and functions, we seek advice from others. But note also the affective element, the feelings that inform the process. We want, desire, wish for a new and better phone. We are perhaps envious of our friends, ashamed of our old-fashioned clunky machine; we are frustrated with the complications of functionality and price and variety available. Finally, we are happy with our choice, proud of our new acquisition, delighted to be in touch with our friends. There is also the volitional element, the deciding, which is operative from the beginning in our questioning, in each step forward that we make to the final decision of paying for the purchase. We can decide to stop, to reverse, to change direction at any stage of the process.

Scale of Values

There are many different kinds of values. Above we considered an example of evaluating which is primarily economic. But the same process and the same components are involved in moral evaluations. Are all these values of equal worth? Or are values all the same? Or is there a chaos of values? One can slice values in various ways but the most fundamental is to follow the five levels of conscious activity constitutive of the human person. In that framework we can distinguish vital, social, cultural, moral and religious values in a hierarchical, structural scale of values.

Vital values are characteristic of the human person as living, as sensing, as embodied, as satisfying the needs of sensitive living. Health, vitality, energy, food, clothing, housing, propagation, growth, sleep, and the like are examples of vital values. Certain foods are good for you. Get a good night’s sleep. This will make you grow big and strong. Vital values loosely correlate with the level of experiencing. You cannot pick up any magazine without being given free advice on what to eat, how to exercise, what is good for your health. We are all familiar with the adage, primum vivere, deinde philosophare, which might be translated, take care of vital values and then seek the higher.

Social values are characteristic of the good order of a society. We are also social animals. There are various ways in which we structure social relations in a society of specialization of roles, cooperation, law and order, principles of equality, and the like. Efficiency, order, differentiation, regularity, cooperation,
economic use of resources are examples of social values. They presuppose vital values but in principle are at a higher order as they loosely correlate with the level of understanding. We satisfy individual needs only in the context of a well-functioning polis or society.

**Cultural values** are the beliefs and values inherent in a way of life. These values are embodied in the constitution, inculcated in an educational system, they underpin the judicial system. We value truth, education, science, technology. We respect the values of tolerance and freedom and equality. The truth of our history is embodied in the myths, the institutions, traditions, stories, songs. Different cultures have various configurations or ways of expressing these cultural values.

**Moral values** are the values implicit in our relations to one another as free and responsible human persons. Moral values correlate loosely with the level of deciding, valuing and implementing. This is the good of the individual as he realizes his freedom as a responsible person. Honesty, tolerance, justice, responsibility, freedom, equality, respect are examples of moral values.

**Religious values** trump all other values. To be fully human is to be more than human. And so *homo religiosus* (man a religious being) values holiness, unqualified love, worship, salvation, the gift of grace, prayer, and the like. The human person is by nature open to the divine and reaches fulfillment only in religious self-transcendence.

The scale of values helps us to see that there are different levels of value, and that they are dependent on one another, the higher presupposing the lower and at the same time going beyond the lower and introducing something new and more valuable. Not all values are at the same level. Values are not all equal. The good is an analogous notion. The division into levels is not arbitrary but based on our complex nature as sensitive, intellectual, rational, moral and religious beings.

It also reminds us that values are everywhere. They are embedded in every activity, every institution, every policy, in education, politics, laws, courts, governments, banks, hamburger joints, and the like. It is an illusion to say that anything is value-free, usually a mask for a secular, relativist, politically correct agenda. I am claiming that we have the innate potential not only to know the truth but also to know the good, namely, value.
Values are not arbitrary preferences as maintained by Emotivists but really give us objective knowledge of good and evil, value as true or false. That is not to say that we are always right, that we never make mistakes. But significantly we can recognize our mistakes, learn from them and avoid similar goofs in the future.

**Intellectual Component**

Let us now attend to the process of evaluating and identify the role of intelligence and the role of feeling. This is the crucial issue between the emotivists and the rationalists. We take a middle course between these two extremes asserting the legitimate constitutive role of both intelligence and feeling. Let us first try to define the role of intelligence, reflection and deliberation, judgment, and later assess the role of feelings.

Emotivists in our popular culture assume the position that values are just expressions of arbitrary preferences guided by feelings mostly of self-interest. All we have to do to rebut this position is to attend to how in fact we ask questions about the worth of something, assemble evidence and information relevant to seeking an answer, recognize the moment when the intellect seizes on the sufficiency of the evidence for a conclusion, and utters the judgment of value. We do not choose a mobile phone at random on feeling alone; we do not choose a career path on feeling alone; we do not choose a life partner in marriage on feeling alone; we do not choose to have or not to have an abortion on feeling alone. All sorts of relevant questions enter our mind, set us on a path of seeking relevant information, understanding and advice and move us towards a judgment. There is a crucial constitutive intellectual component in knowing the value of a course of action, a person, or the worth of something.

Once we start asking questions we are using our intelligence and seeking knowledge. As soon as we are asking questions about the worth of some thing or action or person we are seeking knowledge of values. In the moral sphere we ask questions about right and wrong, good and evil, right courses of actions and wrong courses of action. We ask about the moral fiber of our politicians, of our church leaders, of our bankers, of our media. Are they doing what they should be doing? Are they the kind of persons we would trust with our money or our children? Are they people of integrity, of honesty, of justice, of compassion, of duty? We are abundant in our judgments about people in the public eye. We seem to be able to reach conclusions about such people and judgments are the work of intelligence. For the most part we usually get it right but of course we can make mistakes.
We can jump to conclusions, we can be biased, we can follow conventional wisdom, which may not always be right.

Lonergan recognized the question of value and the judgment of value but was not clear about what came in between. In *Insight* he was very clear on the reflective insight which comes between the question of truth and the judgment of truth: it is the grasp of the sufficiency of the evidence and the link between the evidence and the conclusion. If there is sufficient relevant evidence for the conclusion, the judgment of truth follows. It is not hard to notice that at the level of values a similar insight occurs, which we call the deliberative insight. It is an intellectual grasp of the sufficiency of the evidence for the value of something. We can know the value of something or some person. We can have a knowledge of good and evil. We can distinguish true and false values in general and in particular. We can judge the worth of something. Such judgments are not just true for me here and now and not true for you. They are objective in the sense that the conclusion rests on evidence that is relevant and sufficient; the conditions are fulfilled. The value judgment is the conclusion of an intellectual process of asking questions, assembling arguments and evidence, and finally coming to a conclusion.

Affective Component

Does this mean that we have adopted a rationalist position? By no means. What then is the role of feelings in the process of evaluations, particularly moral judgments? Again we attend to questions of fact, to our own experience of moral evaluations. In a class here in Duquesne the students were able to name more than a hundred feelings within half an hour. Chief among them were desires, fears, love, hate, remorse, guilt, disgust, anger, responsibility, unease, tense, stressed, excited, perturbed, confused, hesitant, confident, and so on and so forth; the list is endless. Do these feelings enter into the process of moral deliberation? Of course they do. We are feeling animals. We are very articulate in naming and distinguishing various feelings. But how and where and to what extent do they enter into moral deliberation?

We tend to think in terms of feelings that are good and feelings that are bad. Lonergan makes much of the distinction between intentional and non-intentional feelings. I do not think that these are the relevant distinctions we need here. The key distinction seems to be between (1) feelings which normally result in self-transcendence and (2) feelings which are morally ambiguous. This is a distinction Lonergan does make a few sentences later.
What are these feelings which normally tend to development, to conversion, to knowing and choosing the true and the good? In *Insight* Lonergan constantly talks about the importance of the pure detached unrestricted desire to know. His whole position on human knowing, the dynamic of the activities, the intentionality implicit in the activities, rests on the desire to know. We feel it in our curiosity, our wonder, our questioning, our searching, our joy in success and our frustration at failure. Lonergan never explicitly names the desire to know as a feeling. But if a desire to know is not a feeling what is it? Are not desires feelings? We feel them, they move us in a certain direction, they are the mass momentum drive of human living. The desire to know is one way of identifying the feelings that normally lead us in the direction of self-transcendence. It is deep, long lasting, gives direction to our search, leads us to inquire relentlessly for truth and value. It is what distinguishes us from brute animals.

What is the role of this desire? Is it extrinsic to the process of knowing or is it constitutive of the process? I would answer in this way. Can you imagine a knowing that does not start in a desire to know expressed in questioning, driving you forward through research and deliberating, forcing you to make a judgment when sufficient evidence is grasped, and is content that truth has been attained. Without the desire to know we do not ask questions and so do not understand anything. Understanding is a dynamic activity and the dynamic is provided by the desire to know. Even Aristotle recognized the active role of intellect in questioning and its passive role of receiving insights. Aristotle's active intellect throws light on images so that we may understand; it initiates the process of knowing; it is in act rather than in potency. The active intellect is the pure question. The passive intellect receives, it is somehow passive. Insight comes suddenly and unexpectedly as a release of the tension of inquiry; it passes into the habitual texture of the mind. But the intellect, Aquinas will insist, is one personal intellect. So we can assert that the desire to know simply as a feeling is a constitutive element of human knowing of truth and value. In his later writings, Lonergan shifted to the terminology of the transcendental precepts to identify more clearly the feelings that lead to self-transcendence, namely, be attentive, be intelligent, be reasonably, be responsible, be in love.

Besides those feelings aiming at self-transcendence, there is a class of feelings which are morally ambiguous; they can lead in the right direction or not. These are sensitive feelings, feelings that are biological and involve sensitive, chemical or biological changes; they are bodily based. They are morally ambiguous in
the sense that in themselves they are neither good nor bad: it is only in the context of a free developing moral person knowing, deciding and acting that such feelings enter into the moral domain. Anger is an example of such a feeling. One can be filled with righteous anger over injustice, corruption, discrimination, child abuse and the like. One should feel angry at such evils. On the other hand, you have the more selfish anger of road rage, anger at a crying baby on a plane, anger at what is perceived as personal slights.

A counselor might ask, how do you feel about that? Are you comfortable with that? It is a legitimate question. In discerning our feeling orientation we should be able to distinguish the deep rooted sense of obligation to be attentive, intelligent, reasonable and responsible, from the more superficial, sensitive, transient, ambiguous feelings of desire, attraction, or satisfaction.

**Volitional Element**

There is yet another central element to be taken into account when we are judging the value of a course of action and that is our effective freedom. We are capable of knowing what is right and good but not actually deciding in line with that judgment. This is supremely irrational but that is the point where we are not necessitated to follow our intellect but can choose to turn from good and do evil. Sin is supremely irrational but it happens all the time. So we acknowledge the possibility that our judgments of value are influenced by (1) rationalization when we adjust our knowledge to suit our actions, by (2) moral renunciation, when we renounce our ability to do good, and by (3) the flight from reflection into blind, thoughtless, activism. The notion of freedom would require a few volumes to explore adequately but in current culture it is mostly misunderstood as freedom of choice, freedom to do as you please, lack of constraints, freedom to follow your bliss, whatever that might be. We need to retrieve a notion of freedom as self-determination, as responsible, as a positive dynamic, as deciding for good as opposed to evil.

**Conscience**

Conscience is a key notion in any contemporary moral philosophy. Our account of the activities of questioning, deliberating, judging, deciding and implementing the judgment as well as the three components of cognitive, affective and volitional, all unite and help us to understand the notion of conscience. Conscience is not just a little voice or a feeling of guilt. It is an awareness of the feeling of moral obligation and our fidelity or infidelity to that imperative in our deliberation,
decision and action. Our analysis of knowledge of value has included an intellectual element, an affective element, and an element of freedom. Conscience encompasses the whole process from beginning to end. It is both a feeling and an intellectual process, unfolding in responsible freedom. To be human is to be moral. We are aware of our good deeds as well as of our twists and turns away from the good. Conscience is supreme in the sense that in the end we are responsible for what we value and make of ourselves. We decide for ourselves what we are to make of ourselves.

Conclusion

We used to teach moral philosophy/theology in terms of giving clear yes or no answers to every imaginable case of conscience. In the end it is impossible to cover all imaginable cases. Perhaps it would be better to empower people to make moral judgments of value for themselves. Talk of values is legitimate and helpful in today’s moral climate. People are going to follow what they personally value, sometimes irrespective of authority or church or culture. Unfortunately, values are often regarded as passing feelings or as arbitrary choices. However, there is a sound philosophical underpinning to doing ethics from the point of view of values. This is foundational in the sense that we can recognize the activities and the components involved in good valuing. These capabilities are inherent in every human person. This approach focusses on the good person as the standard and criterion of goodness following the lead of Aristotle. Good value judgments are the a priori conditions for the possibility of becoming a good person. A value framework provides a grid or background from which more proximate or specific methods of discerning the good either by principles of natural law or by virtue ethics can be applied. Such an ethic is appropriate to an age of interiority where we take possession of our own intellectual, affective and volitional dimensions. Our attempting to express our values in mission and vision statements is soundly based both philosophically and theologically.

Endnotes


3B. Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, P31. Intentional feelings relate us to objects. They confer mass, momentum, drive, power, direction. Non-intentional feelings are states and trends such as fatigue, anxiety, bad humour.


5Nicomachean Ethics, 1176a20.