

DOING BETTER

The Next Revolution in Ethics

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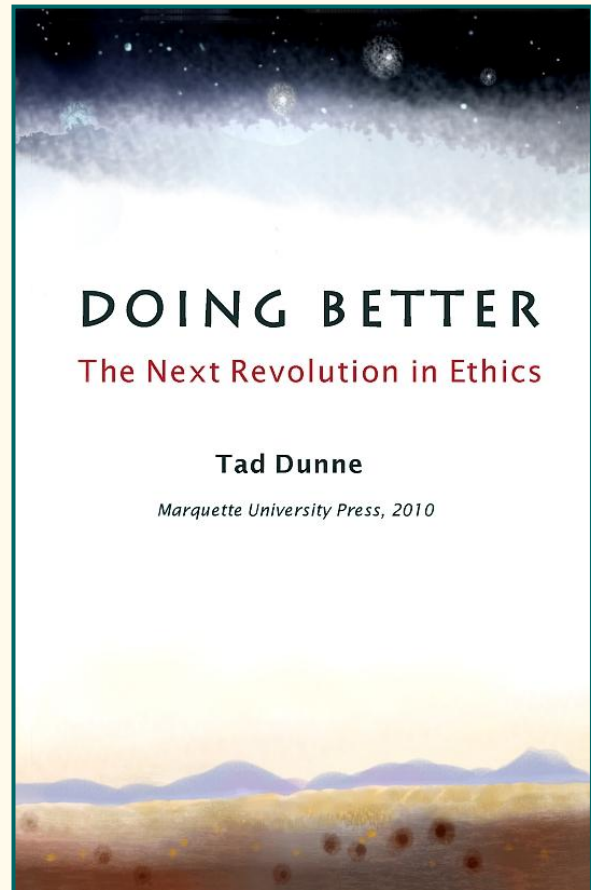
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STUDY GUIDE

Readers wishing to pursue the works of Bernard Lonergan relevant to method in ethics, may consider, as a companion text, *The Lonergan Reader*, ed. Mark D. Morelli and Elizabeth A. Morelli (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997).

The study guide below lists chapters in *Doing Better* in their order of appearance. Under each chapter heading are the related primary sources in *The Lonergan Reader*. Each source begins with a brief introduction and is followed by a few questions. These questions may help guide private reading or may be used for classroom discussion.

In several places, the guide asks for examples. Of course, examples may be more or less specific, but the more specific the better. If, say, you are asked to give an example of bias in science, you might say, “Scientists are biased against looking at moral implications of their discoveries,” or you might say, “Freeman Dyson, who worked on the first atomic bomb was appalled at how thrilled his fellow scientists were when the test bomb successfully exploded.” The advantage of the more specific example is that it more clearly brings the horizons of actual people into any discussion.

Chapter 1: INTRODUCTION

“Introduction” (3-28)

An introduction to the work of Bernard Lonergan, by the editors of *A Lonergan Reader*, Mark D. Morelli and Elizabeth A. Morelli.

Where do the editors see “Lonergan’s Place in Culture”?

How does “self-appropriation,” as Lonergan defines it, contribute to counteracting the forces of social decline?

What sort of “method” is needed to meet the crises of disillusionment and the continual emergence of new challenges?

What role do philosophy and theology play in improving any culture?

“Introduction to Insight” (33-45)

Lonergan’s original and a revised preface, plus the introduction to *Insight*.

What does Lonergan mean that *Insight* gives not an argument but a program?

What makes *understanding* understanding so difficult?

How do the acts of insight and oversight relate to social progress and decline? (37-39)

“Social Alienation and the Second Enlightenment” (558-65)

Large establishments and bureaucracies cause a social alienation characterized by widespread dissatisfaction and hopelessness. Post-Enlightenment advances in historiography, hermeneutics, and cultural anthropology can offer hope and leadership in society.

What particular moral problems do large establishments pose?

What is the Second Enlightenment and how does it relate the First Enlightenment?

“Realms of Meaning” (466-70)

There are different modes of consciousness, or realms of meaning, each defined by a distinct exigence. A systematic (theoretical) exigence differentiates commonsense consciousness to give coherent explanations of phenomena. A critical exigence differentiates from commonsense and systematic modes to account for how thinking in any mode occurs.

What does Lonergan mean by an “exigence”? Give examples.

What might be other terms for the realm Lonergan calls “interiority”?

“Common Sense as Intellectual” (98-105)

Common sense is constituted by a self-correcting process of learning and is driven by a native desire to understand. By itself it has no theoretical inclinations.

How does common sense develop?

What are the chief advantages of common sense?

What are the chief limitations of common sense?

Chapter 2: We Live in a Moral Universe

“Transcendental Method” (445-54) and “Degrees of Self-Transcendence” (596-97)

Consciousness contains normative demands that give cumulative and progressive results. As such, consciousness has a method that transcends all particular objects and modes of inquiry. Evidence of these normative demands is readily available in noticing the degrees of self-transcendence we experience as we move from dreaming, to waking, to wondering, to acting, to engaging others in a shared life.

What does Lonergan mean by *transcendentals*? (Here, note Lonergan’s use of the expression *transcendental notions*.)

What is the point of distinguishing categories and transcendentals?

In a few sentences, state what transcendental method is.

What can transcendental method achieve in ethics?

“Dimensions of Meaning” (387-401)

Meaning is an act which opens onto three dimensions of the world—a world of immediate experience, a world mediated to us by our acts of meaning, and the socio-cultural world constituted by our collective acts of meaning. Classical control of meaning focuses on abstract essences and unchanging truths. Modern control of meaning focuses on concrete data and best available explanations.

Lonergan says “meaning is an act” (388). What does this include? What does this exclude?

Give examples of the “world mediated by meaning.”

What are the key differences between classical and modern ways of controlling meaning?

What has happened to the persuasive power of definitions, doctrines, and authority? Why?

“A Definition of Art” (363-75)

Art is an objectification of a purely experiential pattern. It evokes meanings that are symbolic, allowing for a broad range of interpretations. Art also represents the ulterior significance of realities we cannot fully comprehend but draw us toward them anyway.

How does art relate to moral openness?

What sort of meaning is “symbolic meaning?”

What ulterior significance does art have in terms of *presenting* and *presence*?

Chapter 3: Our Normative Sources Are Within

“The Subjective Field of Common Sense” (105-14)

Experiencing life is not letting whatever is out there come in here. We experience life in pre-patterned and distinct manners.

To what is our attention directed in each pattern of experience?

Give examples of flipping between one pattern of experience and another.

“Self-Affirmation of the Knower” (179-97, particularly at 180-88)

To affirm ourselves as knowers requires knowing what knowing is in the first place. Knowing is not a single act, like looking, Rather it is a compound of empirically experiencing, intellectually understanding that experience, and rationally judging that one’s understanding of that experience is correct.

What is consciousness?

Describe the essential differences between empirical, intelligent, and rational consciousness.

Does this account of consciousness engaged in knowing leave out any essential elements that might require a revision of the account?

Chapter 4: Our Normative Drives Are Ordered

“Cognitive Structure” (380-86)

Knowing is a compound of experience, understanding, and judging. To know oneself as a knower is to experience knowing, to entertain some understanding of this experience, and, by a judgment, to verify that one’s understanding is correct.

In what sense is our knowing “structured”?

In what sense is our knowing “dynamic”?

Why is it important to notice the different levels of being present to ourselves?

“Belief” (332-39)

The context of belief is the general collaboration of people in advancing knowledge. What an individual believes from others and learns personally blends into his or her “mentality.” A critique of one’s beliefs requires discovering one error and tracing all associated errors.

What is the difference between rational consciousness and rational self-consciousness?

Give an example of discovering a mistaken belief and then tracing all associated errors.

Explain what Lonergan means by this sentence: “For the basic problem lies not in mistaken beliefs but in the mistaken believer.”

Chapter 5: Our Normative Drives Are Wounded

“Common Sense and Its Subject” (Neurosis: 114-22)

In the drama of everyday living, the demands of the unconscious may suffer from a biased

intellect, resulting in neurosis.

What exactly is inhibited by neurotic repression?

Give an example of an unwanted insight regarding the drama of ordinary living.

From Lonergan's analysis of neurosis, what strategy might a psychotherapist take with a client?

“Common Sense as Object” (Bias: 123-44)

Our intellects may be biased against insights into the good of other individuals, into the good of other groups, and into anything beyond the scope of common sense.

What is the “dialectic of community”? Give an example.

What sort of insights does “individual bias” avoid? Give an example of an insight that the egoist does not want.

How does group bias differ from egoism?

What sorts of insights does “general bias” avoid? Give an example.

Explain the process of the “longer cycle of decline.”

“The Problem of Liberation.” (275-90)

Rational self-consciousness [the exigence to be responsible] demands consistency between knowing and doing, in both the individual and the group. But while we may be essentially free, we are not effectively free. The problem of liberation is our incapacity for sustained development, owing to the permanent possibility of bias. Some higher integration of human living is necessary to meet the problem of liberation successfully.

Give an example of someone convinced about an obligation and refusing to meet it.

If a “man is not free because he can be unreasonable in his choices,” what is the essence of freedom?

What makes a decision “right”?

What is “in opposition and tension with sensitive and intersubjective attachment”?

Give an example.

What is the “problem of liberation”?

“The Problem of Evil and Its Solution” (The problem: 310-16)

Evil is persistent because our knowledge of a concrete situation and of ourselves is permanently

subject to the oversights that result from bias.

In what sense must a “thesis of progress” be affirmed?

What is the “social surd” and how does it affect efforts to improve life?

What are the theological dimensions of the problem of evil?

What features are needed in a “critical human science”? Give an example of such a science.

Chapter 6: Our Normative Drives Are Healed

“Healing and Creating in History” (566-76)

Human development is of two different kinds. A creative development moves upward from experience, to understanding, to judgment, to fruitful courses of action. A healing development moves downward from the love of family, humankind, and God, to seeing values with the eye of love (including the value of undoing the many forms of bias), to overcoming determinism through hope.

Are we clever but wicked? Good but stupid? Both? Neither?

How does creativity work in history? Give an example.

How does healing work in history? Give an example.

What role does religion play in healing and creating in history?

“Religion” (471-82)

An analysis of our self-transcendence demonstrates that at least the question of God belongs to our nature. Being in love with God is first a dynamic, conscious state, but it is not necessarily recognized as such. Faith is the knowledge of values and truths resulting from being in love with God.

How does the question of God arise from analyzing intelligence? From analyzing reason? From analyzing responsibility?

How does being in love with God affect one’s responsibility? One’s reason? One’s intelligence?

Give an example of the knowledge of some value that springs from religious love.

Chapter 7: The Open Ethicist

“Openness and Religious Experience” (376-79)

We have a natural desire to know everything. We move toward achieving that knowledge when we follow the exigences of attentive, intelligent, and rational [reasonable] consciousness.

Entering into a personal relationship with God enables openness as a gift.

Why are many post-Enlightenment philosophies closed to revealed truths?

Lonergan wrote this in 1961, where his focus was largely on being open to all knowledge. How might this view of openness be extended to being open to all value?

“Dialectic” (Horizons, Conversions and Breakdowns: 518-27)

A horizon is the entire field of one’s knowledge and interests. Differences in horizons may be complementary [perspectival], genetic [developmental], or dialectical [radical]. Intellectual, moral, and religious conversions involve an about-face and a new beginning that moves into a new horizon. Historically, a society can break down owing to incomplete or absent conversions.

Give an example of a “vertical exercise of freedom” and a “conversion.”

In what sense do the empiricist, the idealist, or the realist “never mean” with the other two mean?

What is the essence of an intellectual conversion?

What is the essence of a moral conversion?

What is the essence of a religious conversion?

“Static and Dynamic Viewpoints” (545-49)

A static viewpoint is the ideal of deductivist logic, where any conclusion is already implicit in premises. A dynamic viewpoint advances by discovering what has not been discovered. It looks to the various differentiations of consciousness to articulate their respective methods.

What are the main contributions to be made by logic?

What is the meaning of “method” that characterizes a dynamic viewpoint?

Give an example of an “empirical notion of system” and the notion that results from “the appropriation of one’s conscious and intentional operations.”

“Human Development and Genuineness” (253-62)

Human development moves through shifting patterns of experience, following lines of successful functioning, and integrating advances throughout consciousness. Being genuine, far

from being “just myself as I honestly am,” requires adverting to the tension between who I am and who I ought to be and dealing with this tension explicitly.

Give an example of one typical way one avoids the challenge of being genuine.

To *be* wise is to *know* the right questions. But to *become* wise is to *ask* the right questions.

How is this vicious circle broken?

In what way do those who fail in genuineness escape the tension between who they are and who they ought to be?

“Judgments of Value” (456-60)

Judgments of value issue from judgments of fact about a situation and feelings oriented toward the truly good. Moral growth can open one’s horizon to God, while moral decline can bring ruin to the individual and to a community of any size.

How do judgments of value relate to judgments of fact? To feelings?

Give an example of a judgment of value when judgments of fact are deficient.

Give an example of a judgment of value when feelings are insufficiently oriented toward ontic value. Toward qualitative value.

“The Structure of Human Good.” (460-65)

“Good” has three analogous and related meanings: the particular goods we desire, a good of order which, through myriad social institutions, provides particular goods regularly, and the terminal value or objective worth of particular goods and social institutions.

What functions of consciousness relate respectively to the three meanings of “good”?

Give examples of “common or opposed feelings about qualitative values” (463).

Give examples of “common or opposed feelings about ...scales of preference” (463).

Chapter 8: Method

“The Subject” (420-25)

Prior to the contemporary attention to the subject, many philosophies have neglected the subject, owing to a simplistic notion of objectivity, a static notion of metaphysics, and of a science founded on logic alone. Others truncate the subject by overlooking what understanding is. Still others wrap the subject totally within by assuming that knowing is grasping an “out there” from an “in here,” and ending up bewildered about how our “in here” gets “out there.” In contrast, the existential subject is constituted by successive levels of conscious self-

transcendence.

How do insights and concepts each function in our knowing?

Give an example of a conceptualist treatment of a moral issue.

In your own words, compare Kant and Lonergan on “objectivity.”

What does Lonergan mean by saying that value is a *transcendental notion*?

Chapter 9: Models

“Natural Right and Historical Mindedness” (580-95)

An understanding of the idea of a collective responsibility requires understanding both human nature and human historicity. Natural right is defined as a principle by which we raise and answer questions. A dialectic of history emerges insofar as human meanings may be focused on action, on speech, on science and scholarship, and on method. A critique of history is grounded on actual encounter of persons in a manner that reveals one another as embodiments of the natural right of raising and answering questions.

What is the difference between human nature and human historicity?

What is the “natural right” shared by all humans?

Describe the key features of the “three plateaus of meaning.” How would questions about religion be expressed at each plateau?

In the final paragraph of this selection, what is the significance of Lonergan’s statement, “For every person is an embodiment of natural right”?

“History and Historical Method.” (Critical History: 499-508)

Precritical history is an advance over legend, but the functional specialty history has the very limited purpose of stating what was going forward in a community. It requires judicious selection of sources, the construction of a coherent explanation of what may be going forward, and a critical attitude toward both one’s sources and one’s oversights. This process occurs regarding situations, reports of situations, and previous historical accounts of what may have been going forward.

Give an example of the “ecstatic” moment in a historian’s work (501).

For what reasons are historical accounts revised?

Select a contemporary moral issue and trace how the several procedures involved in writing history move the discussion forward. Give an example of the effects of

overlooking one of these procedures.

“Functional Specialties” (483-92)

(A brief overview of eight functional specialties in theology. The division is grounded on four distinct levels of self-transcendence operating first in engaging the past and then in engaging the future.)

For each of the eight specialties in theology, indicate the corresponding functions in ethics.

What is the particular function of *dialectic* with regard to ethics?

What is the particular function of *foundations* with regard to ethics?

Chapter 10: Practical Ethics

“Dialectic” (The Problem and Structure: 527-30)

Every sort of investigation is conducted within a horizon. Conversion opens horizons fully while the absence of conversion closes investigators off from basic issues. In the specialty dialectic, investigators develop views they consider compatible with conversion and reverse those they consider incompatible. This brings into the open the actual horizons of ethicists and subjects them to the same judgment about the adequacy of their horizon that they pronounced on the adequacy of certain views or practices.

Why do the natural sciences generally escape the trap of dialectically opposed horizons?

What does it mean to “develop positions, reverse counterpositions”? Give an example from a current debate on a moral issue.

“Foundations” (531-40)

Categories used in theology have their bases in the very principles that produce cultures, chief among which is the free and knowing reception of God’s gift of divine love by the theologian. While this reality is transcultural, it is formulated in a variety of categories, and those that explicitly refer to this core of being in love will also be transcultural. The use of these categories may appear in any of the functional specialties, but their refinement occurs in the specialty dialectic.

In light of Lonergan’s presentation of *foundations* in theology, what might be the base of categories in ethics?

How does the ethicist doing *foundations* develop general categories?

How does he or she develop special categories for ethics?

Chapter II: Conclusion

“Praxis” (577-79)

Praxis addresses the issue of what one is to do about authentic and unauthentic developments. It becomes an academic subject as human studies reveal actual differences between progress and decline within their fields. It moves from a hermeneutic of suspicion to a hermeneutic of recovery.

What are factors today that promote “academic serenity”?

What implications for ethics lie in the statement, “Authenticity cannot be taken for granted”?

What role does being in love play in the movement of praxis “from above downward”?

Appendix A: Special Concepts in Ethics

“Dialectic of Authority” (550-57)

Authenticity makes power legitimate, and it makes authorities legitimate. The dialectic of communities moving forward under the forces of both authenticity and unauthenticity is extremely complicated. A more effective approach than analysis is the promotion of self-sacrificing love as healing the sources of unauthenticity and reversing its effects in a community’s heritage.

What general ethical strategy emerges from this analysis of authority?

Give an example of a specific strategy for reversing the decline of a specific community. (Consider a dysfunctional family; a city growing poor, violent and ugly; or a foreign policy impeding the advance of poor countries.)

Give an example of a “creative minority” resolving a moral issue.

“Method in Metaphysics” (The Problem, Definition, and Method: 222-38)

The principles of metaphysics are the desire to know and its unfolding in empirical, intellectual, and rational consciousness of the self-affirming subject. These principles may be latent or explicit. As explicit it will be an ordered set of heuristic notions that guide investigations in a progressive manner. It functions not by clearly conceiving its goal but by inviting intelligent and rational cooperation with the desire to know.

If the problem is “not mere conflicting propositions,” what is the essential conflict which a metaphysics can resolve?

In what sense is objectivity not a property of objects but a consequence of intelligent inquiry and critical reflection?

Explain the meaning of the terms and their relations in the definition of metaphysics as “the conception, affirmation, and implementation of the integral heuristic structure of proportionate being.”

Describe the movement from a latent to an explicit metaphysics.

“The Notion of Objectivity” (211-21)

The principle notion or anticipation of objectivity occurs in a context of many judgments. Each judgment itself posits an absolute. It emerges under norms of consciousness. It relies on data as given. [Note: Lonergan once commented that learning what objectivity is normally begins from experiential, to normative, to absolute, to the principal notion.]

Give an example of how commonsense judgments rely on the principal notion of objectivity.

Why is experiential objectivity a partial aspect of objectivity?

Why is normative objectivity a partial aspect of objectivity?

Why is absolute objectivity a partial aspect of objectivity?

“The Future of Thomism” (402-07)

The future of Thomism will involve a set of shifts: From logic to method; from science as certain knowledge to science as progressive understanding; from a metaphysics of the soul to self-appropriation of the subject; from apprehension of the human in terms of nature to terms of historicity; and from first principles to transcendental method.

What effect on ethics does a shift from virtues and vices to transcendental method imply?

How does being aware of history affect ethics?

How does the self-appropriation of the subject affect ethics?

“Theology in Its New Context” (408-19)

Beginning in 1680, the appearance of modern science, the ideals of the Enlightenment, and dogmatic theology changed how theology was done up to the 20th century. A new context of

empirical methods has affected human studies in philosophy, science, art, literature, and the professions. A firm basis for criticizing error may be found not in verbal propositions but in self-transcending humans.

In what sense is method the foundation of ethics?

How might ethics address the problem of “reducing [moral] doctrine to probable opinions”?

Give an example of how a converted ethicist “apprehends differently, values differently, relates differently.”

Besides reflection on moral conversion, how is reflection on intellectual and religious conversion related to ethics?