Alessandra Gillis, "Lonergan's Ethics and Feminist Ethics: Exploring the Meaning of *Care*"
Journal of Macrodynamic Analysis 7 (2012): 27-43

Lonergan's Ethics and Feminist Ethics: Exploring the Meaning of *Care*

Alessandra Gillis

Introduction

Over the past thirty years or so, the feminist focus on the *ethic of care* has changed the way in which scholars and 'lay people' alike think about ethics. This change is important in two particular ways. Firstly, feminist scholarship, as well as the feminist movement in general, is a lively socio-political issue today, so feminist work in ethics is a valuable contribution to the body of ethics as a whole. Secondly, by focusing attention on the *concrete* context of moral decision-making, especially the notion of *care*, feminist scholars have opened the door to meaningful discussion of the word *care*—how it is to be understood, and what is its role in moral decision-making. It is in this latter context, I believe, that Lonergan's theory of ethics can be very beneficially applied.

I begin, then, with a brief view of the feminist perspective on the *ethic of care*. In a second section, I ask about the meaning of the word *care*, and draw on Lonergan's formulation of our 'minding operations' and the structure of our consciousness, especially the role of the what-to-do dynamic, to arrive at our answer: the full heuristic process of *caring*. Here I invite needed self-attention to our own conscious operations that underpin both the activity and meaning of *care*. In a third section, I explore Aquinas' work on the *will* in the *Summa Theologica*, of obvious import to Lonergan, in order to meet the feminist demand for a fuller context (linking feelings, plans, actions, and decisions) of moral deliberation. A final section turns to the larger context of caring for History. Here I enlarge significantly on the meaning of the word *care* by introducing Lonergan's functional specialization as an '*ethic of care*' that will care about the field of ethics, and indeed about global history, in a radically new way. Since feminist scholars themselves have raised the question and notion of *care*, they are perhaps most likely in our contemporary society to begin to be open to this larger appreciation of Lonergan's ethical theories.

I – The Notion of *Care* in Feminist Ethics

Over the last three decades, scholars in the field of feminist ethics have drawn strongly on the work of Carol Gilligan[1] to develop what is called an 'ethic of care.' Their work takes issue with traditional theories of ethics that have used only boys or men in their sample studies and that have portrayed moral deliberation as an activity that can be reduced to one or another set of logical principles. By contrast, an 'ethic of care' theory is based on the empirical evidence of girls and women in situations of moral deliberation. From their observations, feminist scholars have noticed what I consider to be two significant trends. First, given hypothetical scenarios of moral deliberation, girls and women tend to desire and ask for 'more information,' that is, they are instinctively oriented toward the actual circumstances of a real concrete situation, and are not satisfied with the hypothetical scenario as an adequate test of moral deliberating. Second, there is a tendency for girls and women to respond to hypothetical questions for moral deliberation with answers that disrupt traditional expectations for 'logical resolutions,' to focus instead on the complexity of the activity of *caring* (for people and relationships involved, etc.) rather than on any logical set of ideals for 'right,' 'good,' or 'correct' behaviour.

A clear example of this caring focus is found in Gilligan's book, *In a Different Voice*. In chapter two, she compares the responses of a young girl and boy to a particular hypothetical moral problem.[2] The illustration illuminates a difference of spontaneous moral orientation in the answers of a boy and girl, both 11 years old. In the hypothetical situation, a man named Heinz considers whether or not to steal an expensive drug, which he cannot afford, in order to save his wife from dying. To the question 'should Heinz steal the drug?,' the boy considers the dilemma as "sort of like a math problem" and proceeds to argue in favour of Heinz stealing the drug, giving reasons why this is "the only thing that is totally logical."[3] The girl considers the problem in light of its possible consequences for Heinz and his wife and then proceeds to deliberate about other possible options for attaining the drug.[4]

Gilligan and others in feminist ethics have given the name *care* to designate the girl's approach to the moral problem. In feminist terms, the girl considers the problem from a so-called *caring* perspective,

---

[1] Carol Gilligan, *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1982; 1993).

[2] This illustration is taken from a study devised and given by Lawrence Kohlberg to measure moral development in adolescence.

[3] Gilligan, *In a Different Voice*, 26-7. Chapter two gives the account of this study and a comparison of the fuller implications surrounding these two answers.

[4] In Kohlberg's study, the girl is classed as being inferior in moral development to the boy because her answer does not fit Kohlberg's model of 'stages of moral development.'

concerned about the people involved, the relations between these people, and the possible outcomes of their actions. The boy considers the problem from what Gilligan and others have named a *justice* perspective, that is, concern about arriving at an answer that logically justifies the actions and decisions made in a moral problem. Many feminists in the field of ethics consider that the *caring* perspective adds significant data to traditional theories of moral development and ethics.

A primary question in feminist ethics, then, is what does the word *care* mean? A range through the literature has led to the initial conclusion that the word *care* in feminist ethics is associated with action, with doing. It is worth quoting someone I consider to be rare for her description of this practical activity of caring:

> Apprehending the other's reality, feeling what he feels as nearly as possible, is the essential part of caring from the view of the one-caring. For if I take on the other's reality as possibility and begin to feel its reality, I feel, also, that I must act accordingly; that is, I am impelled to act as though on my own behalf, but in behalf of another. Now, of course, this feeling that I must act may or may not be sustained. I must make a commitment to act. The commitment to act in behalf of the cared-for, a continued interest in his reality throughout the appropriate time span, and the continual renewal of commitment over this span of time are the essential elements of caring from the inner view [of the one caring].[5]

In the midst of the literature of feminist ethics, this paragraph stands out as an excellent description of the concrete experience and reality of what it is to care. It is worth comparing Noddings' statement with Aquinas' talk about care in the *Summa*—that is for section three. For now, it is important to be clear on one distinction: feminist descriptions of the meaning of *care*, however well done, are descriptive and, as in many disciplines, trapped in a state of truncation.[6] By connecting the ideas on care in feminist ethics with the significance of the dynamics of practical consciousness, the notion of *care* within feminist ethics can be enlarged and given a new precision.

---

[5] Nel Noddings, *Caring: A Feminine Approach to Ethics and Moral Education* (2nd ed.) (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2003).

[6] On the question of truncation as related to self-knowledge and the appropriation of one's own dynamic structure of consciousness, see Bernard Lonergan, "The Subject," in *A Second Collection* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1974), 69-86. Briefly, the neglected subject does not know himself or herself. The truncated subject not only does not know him/herself but also does not know that there is anything there to know, and so concludes to the irrelevance of such matters.

II – Care and Planning: 'What-To-Do?'[7]

When we think of ethics, I think it is fair to say that traditionally the emphasis has been on the reflective process, the process that asks whether or not a certain thing should be done. This emphasis comes out in the example from Gilligan, where the question posed to the children is "*should* Heinz steal the drugs?" Yet this reflective question—a form of "is it to be done?"—presupposes a particular plan of action. For instance, in the example from Gilligan, the question posed to the children could be re-phrased as "should Heinz do it?" This re-phrasing clearly brings out the fact of some presupposed plan: if one does not know *what* the plan is, the following question would naturally be "should Heinz do *what*?" In this case, of course, the plan is to steal the required drugs.

Ethics, properly speaking, then, refers to the full activity of practical consciousness in both its intelligent *'what-to-do?'* and reflective *'is-to-do?'* modes, and especially in the exigent demand for consistency between our knowing (1st to 3rd levels of consciousness) and our doing (what I would identify as our 4th and 5th levels of consciousness). When we are caring for someone or something, we are actively thinking out what is best to do for that person or in that situation. The further question, '*should it be done?*' obviously asks about the plan, or plans, of action that we have already grasped and formulated.[8] A simple illustration is thinking about what to do for dinner. Even in this simple instance, you strive to grasp a good plan, one that pays attention to, or cares for, yourself and your health or else your family and their health, as well as for the aesthetic and social pleasures of sharing food and companionship.

Going back to the children's example of moral deliberation, Gilligan remarks on a notable difference in the process of deliberating of these two children. She notices that the girl spontaneously answers by focusing her attention on Heinz's *plan*, his options for acting (should Heinz *steal* the drugs, or could he solve the problem by doing something else?), while the boy spontaneously answers by focusing his attention on the evaluative or reflective question (*should* Heinz steal the drugs? Is this a good thing to do?).[9] Considering Gilligan's observations in the context of the dynamic structure of consciousness, the girl's orientation is toward the 'what-to-do' level of practical consciousness, while the boy's orientation is toward the evaluative 'is-it-to-be-done' level of practical consciousness.

---

7 I am assuming readers are familiar both with their own dynamic structure of consciousness and its operations, as well as with Lonergan's formulation of that structure in *Insight* (see note 8) and elsewhere.

8 Bernard Lonergan, *Insight*: *A Study of Human Understanding*, ed. Frederick Crowe and Robert Doran, vol. 3, *Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992), chapter 18.2.3.

9 Gilligan, *In a Different Voice*, 31.

What Gilligan and feminists in ethics are taking issue with is not so much the sticky problem of a 'male' versus a 'female' pattern of moral deliberating as much as with the formulations traditionally used for *taking measure* of our processes of moral deliberation. Nel Noddings brings this out eloquently, talking about problems in the pedagogy of morality by comparing it to problems in the pedagogy of mathematics:[10]

> A difficulty in mathematics teaching is that we too rarely share our fundamental mathematical thinking with our students. We present everything ready-made as it were, as though it springs from our foreheads in formal perfection. The same sort of difficulty arises when we approach the teaching of morality or ethical behaviour from a rational-cognitive approach. … I think we are doubly mistaken when we approach moral matters in this mathematical way. First, of course, we miss sharing the heuristic processes in our ethical thinking just as we miss that sharing when we approach mathematics itself formally. … Second, when we approach moral matters through the study of moral reasoning, we are led quite naturally to suppose that ethics is necessarily a subject that must be cast in the language of principle and demonstration. This … is a mistake.
>
> Many persons who live moral lives do not approach [hypothetical] moral problems formally. Women, in particular, seem to approach moral problems by placing themselves as nearly as possible in concrete situations and assuming personal responsibility for the choices to be made. They define themselves in terms of *caring* and work their way through moral problems from the position of one-caring. This position or attitude of caring activates a complex structure of memories, feelings, and capacities. Further, the process of moral decision making that is founded on caring requires a process of concretization rather than one of abstraction.[11]

Somehow, in Noddings' opinion, and my own, traditional moralists are lacking in their talk about how we act morally when they treat our ethical processes as another form of logical deduction, that is, as an exercise in hypothetical reasoning about (why or why not to do) some particular action. In treating ethics this way, theorists have passed over two key factors: they have "miss[ed] sharing the heuristic processes in our ethical thinking" and they have overlooked the "complex structure of

---

[10] Noddings speaks here of the problem of conceptual presentation. Lonergan helped Eric O'Connor overcome that same problem in O'Connor's teaching of mathematics. See the article, "*Insight* Revisited," in *A Second Collection*, 263-278, at 267-68. See also O'Connor's tribute to Lonergan, "From a Mathematician," in *Spirit as Inquiry: Essays in Honor of Bernard Lonergan, S.J.* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1964), 13-15.

[11] Noddings, *Caring*, 8.

memories, feelings, and capacities"[12] that our concrete moral deliberations actually involve.

Again, considering these incisive observations in the context of the dynamism of our practical consciousness, we can say that traditional accounts of moral process, as well as tests devised to measure our moral activity, have tended to ignore the function and significance of the full heuristic of our practical consciousness and its activity, especially, it seems, the *what-to-do* activity of questing as preceding the evaluative *is-it-to-be-done* activity of moral decision-making and its consequent moral reasoning.

III – Aquinas on *Consent*

The full heuristic of practical, ethical consciousness thus includes the dynamism of both the *what-to-do* and the *is-to-do* capacities of mind. Certainly Aquinas embraces this full heuristic in his work on *will* in the *Summa Theologica*, Prima Secundae, qq. 6-17. In this monumental passage of over a hundred pages, you might say that Aquinas is reflecting in intricate detail on what it is to care, and there is no doubt that Lonergan was influenced by these questions since he referred to them in his published doctoral thesis, *Grace and Freedom.*[13]

It is worth pointing to Aquinas, not with the impossible intent of summarizing this magnificent effort, but by focusing in on one specific topic: *consent*. I have chosen Q. 15 on *consent*, since this question pulls together several threads relevant to my purpose of filling out the feminist meaning of care. By exploring concretely and self-attentively the four threads of *consent*, *ends*, *means*, and *choice* in Aquinas' Q. 15, I hope to begin the adventure of "sharing the heuristic processes in our ethical thinking" while also exploring the "complex structure of memories, feelings, and capacities" that Noddings identifies. What I hope to do is elicit enough clues to indicate the complexity of Aquinas' own obviously self-attentive work on this activity of practical consciousness, and at the same time point us in the direction of a fuller context that feminists suspect is needed.

I begin, then, with article 3: *is consent about ends or means?* First of all, what does Aquinas mean when he talks about ends and means? He states, "The ordered sequence for practical action is as follows. First, the end is apprehended. Next, it is desired. Then the means of obtaining it are deliberated about, and these in their turn come before desire." This is a compact and dense statement. What is Aquinas talking about? I think the first thing to notice is that when Aquinas is talking about *ends* and

---

[12] *Ibid*.

[13] Lonergan refers three times to this feature of Aquinas' work In *Grace and Freedom*, Lonergan refers three times to this feature of Aquinas' work. In *Grace and Freedom: Operative Grace in the Thought of St Thomas Aquinas*, ed. Frederick Crowe and Robert Doran, vol. 1, *Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000), 94, 318, 412.

means and *deliberation* and *desire* and the *sequence of practical action*, he is always talking about our mindful processes, what we do when we do thinking, planning, evaluating, deciding, and acting. It is fatally easy to glide into thinking of these activities, these doings, as abstractions residing in some realm of concepts. But they are remarkably concrete. So in understanding 'ethics' we need to pay attention to ourselves when we are doing, no matter how small and seemingly insignificant our doing is. Can we each think of a simple example, a simple instance, in which we apprehend an end and then desire it? Can we think of an instance in which we deliberate about the means of obtaining that end? Is this statement true of us and of our practical processes of thinking?

Of course, there are all sorts of instances to pause over self-reflectively since we are regularly 'being ethical.' One activity I enjoy pausing over is sport. In my neighbourhood there are weekend soccer games that I often go and watch, and it is enlightening to struggle over the process involved in even the momentary pause when a player receives the ball and has to make a move with it. The end is pretty straightforward, at least at first thought**:** to score. But the means are terrifically complex: possibilities for passing to any of ten other team mates, the necessity to take in what is happening with each player and the opponents, the skills of players who are free to take the ball, further possible plays created by what you might do, and so on and so on. So in a split second, the player deliberates about possible means of getting the ball down the field to the opponents' net for the eventual 'end' of scoring.

What this example brings out is an initial self-attentive meaning of 'means' as directly related to our what-to-do deliberations. What are means? From this instance, the means are the intelligently grasped plans of action: I can do this, do that, or do something else. So means are what I arrive at from and in that dynamic state of asking 'what is to be done?' They are the content and object of my practical intelligence in its what-to-do mode. And the practical ideas I grasp obviously rest on my previous knowledge. In soccer (or any sport), a player unfamiliar with the game is at a loss for what to do (with the ball), and so play between unskilled and less knowledgeable players tends to be erratic, whereas play between skilled, knowledgeable players reveals a more habitual development and a much wider range of possible plans of execution. Watch a team of children compared to a team of older adolescents, for instance. Or watch an amateur versus a professional team.

But we can also bring out this initial self-attentive meaning of *means* by taking a more leisurely and more familiar example of eating out at a restaurant. This example centers on selecting a meal from a menu, an exercise conceived by Philip McShane that is a helpful aid to introspection. Self-attentive struggling with this exercise helps 'shed light' on Aquinas' and Lonergan's clues about our ethical process. You can put yourself, then, in the position of being handed a menu at a restaurant.

What is the end now? It is not quite so straightforward as in the soccer game—it could be several things: a tasty meal, a familiar meal, an adventurous meal, conversation, laughter, quietness, intimacy, leisure, relaxation … but we are focusing on the food and it would seem obvious that we want it to be broadly 'good' as opposed to 'bad,' unappetizing. Is that obvious though? Already it brings up questions about the means. What meal to have that is 'good'? What will I order? What are my criteria for a 'good' meal?

The process of practical deliberation, of asking 'what-to-do?' has me arriving at a number of acceptable or attractive possibilities: lasagna, peppercorn steak, seafood pasta ... But is it as simple as that? Recall the earlier quotation of Noddings' that pointed out a whole missing context of memories, feelings, and capacities. As I look at the menu, I have memories of past meals, appetizing and unappetizing, present images of eating the meal described in the menu, memories of foods that I like or do not like, feelings associated with those memories and with the imagination of eating some one particular meal here and now; in other words, to leap ahead a bit, there are ranges of sets of neuromolecular dynamic capacities acting interdependently and integrally as part of our process of deliberating over what-to-eat/what-to-do.

A further complexity is involved in selecting possible meals for 'final decision.' I scan the menu and at each description I am already breezing dynamically and integrally through all the 'levels of consciousness,' making rapid decisions to include or not include some meal in my list of possible choices. But unless I am neurotically indecisive, I do arrive at a list of possibilities. And at this point, we can bring in another aspect of Aquinas' question of consent.

Almost immediately in Q. 15, Aquinas reminds us that *consent* (from *consentire* in Latin) means *sensing with*. He quotes Damascene saying, "if a man judges without affection for the object of his judgment there is no decision, that is, there is no consent." Again, in his reply to article 1, Aquinas says "To apply and join sensation to an object is the import of consenting." But it seems that Aquinas is not limiting himself to the joining of the immediate 'five' senses but is including under *sensation* our range of emotions that respond to what is good. So he says that consent, an act of appetitive power, "is a certain impulse to a thing itself, and so by analogy its being joined and cleaving to this thing acquires the name of sensing, as it were experiencing it by finding satisfaction in it." Does this remind you of Lonergan's intentional response to values? "Intermediate between judgments of fact and judgments of value lie apprehensions of value." "Intentional responses … answer to what is intended, apprehended, represented." "Such apprehensions are given in feelings." "The feeling relates us, not just to a cause or an end, but to an object. Such feeling gives intentional

consciousness its mass, momentum, drive, power."[14] So we can point to consent being a joining of feeling, a molecular-emotional state of satisfaction in regard to the object or means grasped in my what-to-do deliberating.[15] I arrive at some number of attractive possibilities from the menu *and I consent to each of them*. Aquinas puts it clearly: "For it may well happen that deliberation discloses several means, and since each of these meets with approval, consent is given to each."[16]

What of choice? Is consent the same as choice? Aquinas gives us his answer to this puzzle also in article 3: "Choice adds to consent the notion of a special relationship to that which is preferred to something else, and accordingly a choice still remains open after consent." But sometimes it happens that as we deliberate, as we survey the menu, we come upon only one meal that fits the mood, my tastes, my budget, and so on. In this case, do we still 'choose'? "But if one [means] alone meets with approval, then consent and choice coincide in point of fact, though they remain distinct meanings, for we think of consent as an approval, and of choice as a preference."

Grasping the subtlety of Aquinas' distinction between choice and consent requires a close self-attention on our part to our own acts of deliberation. It also reveals the miraculous complexity of the workings of mind, emotion, psyche, and molecules in what can otherwise seem to be a 'simple mental act.'[17] Aquinas' notion of consent thus points us to two key aspects of our moral activity: the role of the what-to-do dynamic in the full heuristic process of deliberation and the complex workings of memories, feelings, and capacities involved. Both of these are identified by feminists as needing inclusion in traditional theories of ethics.[18]

---

[14] Bernard Lonergan, *Method in Theology* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1971), 37, 30.

[15] The topic of feeling falls under the complexity of the neuromolecular dynamism associated with integral acts of mind. See Philip McShane, *Quodlibet* 19, www.philipmcshane.ca. Also see note 32 below where there is the mention of Daniel Goleman's work in the neuropsychology of acts of volition.

[16] *Summa Theologica*, Ia2ae, Q. 15, a3.

[17] Very helpful here is Candace Pert, *Molecules of Emotion*: *Why You Feel the Way You Feel* (New York: Scribner, 1997).

[18] Earlier I mentioned Lonergan's reference to this work of Aquinas' in *Grace and Freedom*, and it can be safely assumed that Aquinas influences Lonergan's ethics as presented in chapter eighteen of *Insight*. However, *Method in Theology* can appear to be somewhat problematic in that, there, Lonergan repeatedly uses the slogan, "Be attentive, be intelligent, be reasonable, be responsible." It might seem from this slogan, at least initially, that he is not allowing for or including the what-to-do dynamic and all that is involved in it. Yet his writing on intentional response negates that thought, since intentional response is to the object of value, and that object is grasped intelligently through a process of what-to-do deliberation over some possible course(s) of action. Again, consider this sentence in *Method* in which he is talking specifically about these slogans: "Being intelligent includes a grasp of hitherto

It is time to recap. I began by noting that Gilligan and others have brought out a missing 'what-to-do' dynamic in traditional ethics, one that is a spontaneous orientation of girls and women in situations of hypothetical moral deliberation. Noddings has brought out the need for paying pedagogical attention to the *concrete* process of deliberation and for inclusion of the complex structure of memories, feelings, and related neuromolecular capacities involved in this process. Drawing on Lonergan and Aquinas for leads, a concrete self-attentive exploration of our own moral acts and process indeed reveals the significance of the what-to-do dynamic in our full heuristic process of willing, as well as a complex neuromolecular patterning integral to deliberation.

From this conclusion, we can return now to our primary question of feminist ethics: what does the word *care* mean? Immediately, an essential thing to notice about the meaning of the word *care* is that a concrete self-attention and self-affirmation is crucial. If we take the time to do the needed introspection, to attend to ourselves in this practical ethical mode, it seems evident that the full heuristic of our *what-to-do* and *is-to-do* capacities of mind is what underpins the meaning of the word *care*, as well as our actual activity of caring. An understanding of this heuristic process thus proves vital to feminist meanings of *care*. What feminists are doing, then, by their critiques of traditional ethics and their contributions to the *ethic of care*, is valiantly if unwittingly bringing to our attention the fact that the *what-to-do* dynamic, complete with its complement of memories, feelings, and associated neuromolecular patterns of acts, is a central feature in our full ethical heuristic process, since it is here that plans for acting are grasped and formulated prior to being reflected upon in terms of whether or not they should be done.

IV – Caring About Caring: A Collaborative Need

From this enlarged perspective on the meaning of *care*, I turn now to larger questions of caring for History, linking ethics and progress and possible ways of caring for our human meaning and living. In Gilligan's book, there is a report of an interview with a twenty-five year old woman that raises the question of human progress and ethical thinking. In the interview, the woman is asked whether she thinks there is "really some correct solution to moral problems, or is everybody's opinion equally right?" The answer she gives shows evidence of the fact that she seems to spontaneously associate our moral process with progress. It is worth quoting her:

---

unnoticed or unrealized possibilities." *Method*, 53. This is a very precise statement about practical intelligent what-to-do thinking. His statement, 'being intelligent' is clearly not limited to intellectual activity, but also involves our dynamic practical intelligence as we grasp and formulate imagined possibilities.

> No, I don't think everybody's opinion is equally right. I think that in some situations there may be opinions that are equally valid, and one could conscientiously adopt one of several courses of action. But there are other situations in which I think there are right and wrong answers, that sort of inhere in the nature of existence, of all individuals here who need to live with each other to live. We need to depend on each other, and hopefully it is not only a physical need but a need of fulfillment in ourselves, that a person's life is enriched by cooperating with other people and striving to live in harmony with everybody else, and to that end, there are right and wrong, there are things that promote that end and that move away from it, and in that way it is possible to choose in certain cases among different courses of action that obviously promote or harm that goal.[19]

This young woman quite spontaneously links together: our personal acts of choosing, different possible courses of action chosen, right and wrong, values (and particularly the value of cooperation), and the choices we make as either promoting or harming our chosen values.[20] Here we are obviously in the very large and complex territory of caring for progress. But what do I mean, what do we mean, by the word *progress*? That is a question worth a long pause … and certainly is not answerable here. But at least we can try tackling parts of the question in stages, pointing to possible leads and clues.

First, feminists are actively (in common-sense, spontaneous fashion) caring about the progress of ethics as a discipline. The *what-to-do* question is very much alive in this feminist discipline and in this sense feminist ethics itself can be seen as 'ethical.' That is, in the abundant efforts both to critique traditional theories and to illuminate moral processes of women, feminists are caring about theories of moral development and theories of ethics. They are being ethical about ethics.

---

[19] Gilligan, *In a Different Voice*, 20.

[20] Relevant here is the introduction to chapter eighteen of *Insight*, "The Possibility of Ethics," where Lonergan asks about effective freedom: "Is an ethics possible in the sense that it can be observed? Are we condemned to moral frustration? Is there a need for a moral liberation, if human development is to escape the cycle of alternating progress and decline?" These three questions are about effective freedom, but what—or who—is at the root of effective freedom? Does originating value enter in here? Surely *we* are the originating values, our own possibilities of effective freedom? Surely the possibility of effective freedom is our possibility of being ethical? But there is a catch: our way of 'being ethical' depends on our meaning of ethics. So we are back to the problem of taking measure of ourselves, our ethical behavior and our ethical development. In other words, ethics and progress are inextricably linked, and whether or not our freedom is effective depends ultimately on what we mean by ethics.

They are thinking of *what to do* to counteract male bias in this discipline and they are acting on their plans, making their actions effective. In taking this ethical action, they are working toward progress in the overall field of ethics.[21]

Second, the whole of women's studies is an ethical response to an academic world permeated by male bias, a major contemporary social and global issue.[22] More emphatically, feminism—or the women's movement as it was first named—arose out of women's concern and care for social conditions that had relegated them to living severely restricted lives. The rise of feminism at this stage in history is thus a dynamic *what-to-do* response to a long history of women's suppression. In confronting the social situation and evaluating it as fundamentally wrong, feminists are raising elemental questions about human nature, equality, values, and especially about the ethical process itself of choosing how we are to live. In this regard, feminism as a whole is actively—ethically—caring for progress, for history.

Third, caring for history and progress is obviously a very large, indeed global and phylogenetic,[23] undertaking. By analogy, consider what it is to care for some relatively simple particular situation, like ordering dinner, the example I spoke of earlier. Even from that brief reflection on ordering a meal, it seems evident that if my thinking about what to order is to be as intelligent as possible, there is a need in my thinking to draw in the fullness of circumstances. For example, I might think about the people I am with, the talent of the restaurant and its specialities, my budget, the options presented in the menu, my past meals and memories of meals, my present appetites, and so on. There is a smaller or larger network or web of related circumstances that enter

---

[21] Gilligan alone has published numerous articles and has collaborated with many other feminists on the question of feminist ethics and care. Along with *In a Different Voice*, notable volumes edited by Gilligan include *Mapping the Moral Domain*: *A Contribution of Women's Thinking to Psychological Theory and Education* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1988); *Women, Girls and Psychotherapy: Reframing Resistance* (*Women and Therapy Series*) (Kirkwood, New York: Harrington Park Press, 1991); *Between Voice and Silence* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1995). There are scores of other feminists writing in this area, obviously too many to list here.

[22] Alison Jaggar notes that in evaluating the philosophical canon, feminists in ethics should focus on the question of existing male-bias, rather than identifying feminine or masculine qualities in any work since 'feminine' and 'masculine' are notoriously complex and difficult concepts. See her article "Feminist Ethics: Projects, Problems, Prospects," in Claudia Card, ed., *Feminist Ethics* (Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1991), 78-104, at 86-90.

[23] 'Phylogenetic' refers to the ongoing development of the human species. Relevant to this, Lonergan, in chapter 20 of *Insight*, talks repeatedly about the development of the human group toward new and higher conjugate forms of willing.

into my ethical thinking in the degree that I am being fully, normatively intelligent.

Fourth, there is an enormous network or web of circumstances that is somehow to be 'taken into account' when we ask about our human future, when we care for and promote our own progress. Indeed, returning to Aquinas, he draws on Cicero to identify seven 'kinds' of circumstances: *who, what, where, by what aids, why, how, when*.[24] And he goes further to ask whether moral theologians (or philosophers) should take circumstances into account.[25] What is illuminating about his answer is that it squares with the feminist position of an 'ethic of care.' Further, as is commonly known, Aquinas regularly begins each question with 'objections,' the presentation of opinions counter to his own. In this article on circumstances, the first objection asserts: "a theologian is only concerned with the kind of human act that is committed, whether it be right or wrong." Aquinas' objectors claim that since circumstances do not determine this evaluation, they should not be considered. Thinking back to Heinz and the hypothetical situation presented earlier, this 'evaluative' position is precisely what feminists found typified male responses to hypothetical moral problems and is the position they have named a *justice ethic*. It is also the position upon which many traditional models of moral development and testing have been designed.

Again, Aquinas' reply to this objection is enlightening. He states that a moral theologian must consider circumstances on three counts: (1) as ordered to happiness, so that human acts *should fit the circumstances*; (2) insofar as human acts are judged to be right or wrong, better or worse, according to *how they fit the circumstances*; and (3) insofar as human acts are affected by *ignorance or knowledge of circumstances*. Recalling the Heinz case again, it is this attitude that typified female responses to the hypothetical moral problem, which feminists have named an *ethic of care*. Women, feminists observe, tend to put themselves in the hypothetical situation as concretely and fully as possible. They therefore see it not as a case of merely judging whether an action is right or wrong, but as a full complexion representative of how we actually proceed in such situations. As George Eliot puts it so well in *The Mill on the Floss*, "moral judgments must remain false and hollow, unless they are checked and enlightened by a perpetual reference to the special circumstances that mark the individual lot."[26]

Fifth, if an action is to fit the circumstances, it is obvious that we need to ask about and know the circumstances as completely as possible. But more to the point, there is the thinking about *what action to do* that will best meet those circumstances. *What is to be done* to accommodate the given circumstances? So taking in circumstances is an important part

---

[24] Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, Ia2ae, Q. 7, a3.

[25] *Ibid*., a2.

[26] George Eliot, *The Mill on the Floss*, edited and with an introduction by A. S. Byatt (London: Penguin Classics, 1985), 517.

of our moral thinking and indeed a part that requires our *what-to-do* thinking; it is here that we devise and grasp plans that will either more or less successfully meet the particular circumstances of some practical situation.

Moving into the larger context again, now consider the circumstances involved in caring for history and for progress. That web of circumstances is enormous: global, historical, and ongoing—developing and dynamic. Try to imagine, for example, the set of circumstances that unfolds simply in the one discipline of ethics. There are scholars all around the world, feminist and non-feminist, who are thinking about ethics, writing about ethics, attending conferences on ethics, teaching ethics, and so on. There are all the particular social ethical situations and moral actions that arise daily around the world: political decisions, living conditions, education, economies and debts, religions, cultural institutions, on and on. And there is this same sort of mesh of circumstances for each generation, each particular place and time, stretching generation upon generation into the past, revealing the human group's changing ideas about ethics, as well as into the future toward new ideas and possibilities. You see how these circumstances are a web, woven finely together and infinitely overlapping? Is this evolving web not the very web that the discipline of ethics is ultimately concerned about?

Yet we have considered only the discipline of ethics. Our full horizon is a problem of caring for History: how can we care for our human meaning and live in a way that aims at an ongoing progress? To quote one woman, "How might we make our values effective in the world? How might we communicate about what we value? … Answering these questions might begin with reflecting on the circumstances under which our good ideas have changed our own practices."[27]

So we have an ethical problem of how best to organize ourselves and our global society to achieve a possible sustained progress. And we have been given a dynamic solution to that problem in the plan of functional specialization. But how are we to implement this heuristic structure? As a practical solution to a moral and ethical problem of human living, it is clear that Lonergan's intention is for implementation.[28] We are back to the problem of how to lift ourselves into an effective self-directing of our own History.

---

[27] Anna L. Peterson, "Toward a Materialist Environmental Ethic," *Environmental Ethics* 28 (Winter 2006), 380.

[28] Note the striking sentence that opens chapter eighteen of *Insight*: "Metaphysics was conceived as the implementation of the integral heuristic structure of proportionate being." In fact, Lonergan's full definition of metaphysics, in *Insight*'s chapter fourteen, is "the conception, affirmation and implementation of the integral heuristic structure of proportionate being," whereas in chapter eighteen, only implementation is mentioned. It seems clear that what is on Lonergan's mind writing about Ethics in chapter 18 is

As scholars concerned about the movement and growth of the human group, writing ourselves forward, we can make a start by writing about functional specialization and its role in our caring for History. We can write (think, feel out) our questions and ideas of implementation to ourselves and to each other. Further, by placing our questions and ideas within the larger scheme of functional specialization itself (for instance, in dialectic, to begin with), we place ourselves in a system that reveals, connects, organizes, and passes along our positional stands such that we have a hope of building from our many disparate views one fuller view or perspective on what we are doing, what we ought to be doing. This full ongoing perspective is to be our goal, continually building on and building in the best of our efforts to care for History. In this way, an ongoing 'up-to-date' best view can be gleaned from the whole. Without such a perspective, what we are doing as a whole makes little sense:

> By yourself, there is little sense to things. It is like the sound of one hand clapping, the sound of one man or one woman, there is something lacking. It is the collective that is important to me, and that collective is based on certain guiding principles, one of which is that everybody belongs to it and that you all come from it. You have to love someone else, because while you may not like them, you are inseparable from them. In a way, it is like loving your right hand. They are part of you; that other person is part of that giant collection of people that you are connected to.[29]

Could this kind of conviction be possible for us with functional specialization? In chapter eighteen of *Insight* (section 1.1) Lonergan talks about the good of order and it is enlightening to read that section with functional specialization in mind. Then you can muse about functional specialization as a good of order that "stands to single desires as system to systematized … as scheme of recurrence that supervenes upon the materials of desires and the efforts to meet them and … through the fertility of intelligent control, secures an otherwise unattainable abundance of satisfactions." We are all connected to and part of the global web of people and circumstance, whose efforts to understand our human meaning and ongoing living need a unity that will carry us beyond the winds of chance and the problems of the day.

---

implementation. In other words, *what to do*? How are we to secure an ongoing, sustained progress in the face of sin, evil, and a longer cycle of decline? How are we to care for meaning and for history? His later answer of functional specialization is a grand ethic of care, a dynamic plan that meets this vast what-to-do question.

[29] Gilligan, *In a Different Voice*, 160. The passage is a statement by a woman doctor asked to take part in studies on moral deliberation. This was her view of 'ethics and the social reality.'

In feminist ethics alone, a single division of one discipline, this need for unity is felt. As Helen Hunt asks, how are we to cherish and pass on efforts that head us toward progress if we are not aware of them?[30] Again, take the work of Nel Noddings, quoted earlier, or that of Charlene Spretnak.[31] Both have views that I would consider to be, at the very least, exceptionally counter to the status quo and worth passing on in an effective global way. But are their views being systematically circulated? Or have they 'died out,' gone out of fashion? How might their views fit in with other disciplines, like neuroscience (which is something that Spretnak considers)?[32] Such works in their real complexity of interrelated ideas and disciplines need to be gathered up in new refreshing schemes of recurrence of functional systematic caring and collaboration.

This functional collaboration and caring is a very real present need if we are to lift ourselves up and into a view of ourselves and history.[33] But as yet it is only a future hope, not a reality. We need to bring it, write it, into existence by our own ethical *what-to-do* vision. Enter the women's movement. What the women's movement has is vision. It has a widespread vision of caring for the future of humanity. And it is increasingly clear to me that ethics is about vision, effective vision: it is about envisioning *what to do*, what we ought to do and what we will-to-do for the good of humanity. Within that fuller context, it is about envisioning how best to carry out our care, academically and domestically. Feminism, the women's movement, is inherently ethical, intrinsically desirous of caring for human life, the earth, the cosmos, our spirituality, and for all the social institutions through which we

---

[30] Helen LaKelly Hunt, *Faith and Feminism: A Holy Alliance* (New York: Atria Books, 2004). This entire book is representative of the need for retrieving women whose significant contributions to history have been lost and forgotten in history. They need to become part of both feminist and world culture. This task is, of course, central to the women's movement. Yet, will *their* efforts be remembered? Without a system that will ensure the lifting up and moving forward of significant efforts, female and male, all our works will remain at the mercy of each generation's random selection and interest.

[31] Charlene Spretnak, *States of Grace: The Recovery of Meaning in the Postmodern Age* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1991).

[32] Wherever we come from, whether from God, the Raven, Mother Earth, the Great Holy, the fact is "we are here—inextricably linked at the molecular level to every other manifestation of the great unfolding." *States of Grace*, 113, and see that entire chapter (three), "Participation in the Mystery." See also Daniel Goleman's work on the neuropsychology of acts of volition, in Karen Warren, *Ecofeminist Philosophy* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2000), 109-113.

[33] "In our [Western] culture, we have compartmentalized ourselves to the point that we are less effective; for example, even in our counseling community rape counselors rarely talk with domestic violence counselors." Hunt, *Faith and Feminism*, 132.

continuously strive to achieve progress. There is no doubt in my mind that feminism is leading the way. I hope feminists will lead in grasping and implementing that best plan to care for ethics: functional specialization. "It is time to strengthen our ties to other sectors of the culture by cultivating the kind of listening that searches for common ground."[34] Then our words will mirror the listening and caring that has us with God at the center of History directing our own future growth.

Alexandra Gillis has been deeply involved in the work of Bernard Lonergan for twenty-three years. She has written *Thinking Woman* (2006) and is co-author, with John Benton and Philip McShane, of *Introducing Critical Thinking* (2005). She currently works as a secondary school teacher in Vancouver, BC.

[34] Hunt, *Faith and Feminism*, 130.