

What Are Your Expectations in Doing Comparative Interpretation?

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Overview

This essay is an extended invitation to reflect on what you expect comparative interpretation to accomplish.¹ Its purpose is to challenge your understanding and practice in comparing different viewpoints on some common issue. Do you think your development in understanding and practice can accelerate indefinitely? Do you, instead, expect it to level off, even come to a halt, because you have concluded that competing interpretations often reflect fundamental, irreconcilable differences between schools of thought or between different moral-religious traditions?

Part I describes some expectations about comparative interpretation and asks you to make them explicit “objects” of your attention. Part II offers some guidance in identifying your own expectations. It also tackles the difficult question of the criterion: What is the basis for the judgments and decisions that produce developmental rankings of interpretations? Part III asks where you stand in relation to eight expectations about basic issues in comparative interpretation. The invitation to formulate your stances is an invitation to work out your own expectations about expectations, your own viewpoint on viewpoints.

I. Paying Attention to Expectations

Over the years we all acquire determinate sets of expectations about all sorts of issues, e.g. how other people are likely to react to words and gestures, how scholarly or scientific work measures up to standards of competence, how much resistance is likely to await significant departures from familiar ways of acting, why anyone should advocate departures that would evoke resistance. The initial focus of this section is on diverse expectations in comparing different thinkers’ views on some common topic. The guiding purpose of all three sections is to encourage you, the reader, to pay attention to your own expectations about these diverse

¹ “Comparative interpretation” is what I have been using for a number of years in place of “dialectic,” Lonergan’s term for his fourth functional specialty.

expectations and to ask how you might develop them further. Perhaps you are not used to being directly addressed about your expectations as a scholar. Do you find it unsettling, too much of a departure from conventional forms of academic discourse? If so, let me temporarily offer you some relief by shifting the focus to my own expectations, even though doing so is also unconventional.

Years ago I read Lonergan's description of generalized empirical method.² Today I am beginning to appreciate the breadth of its application. For example, to take his advice about self-attention seriously is to be explicit about my own determinate expectations in studying the varied expectations of others. It is also to be alert for signs of shifts in my own expectations. To do otherwise would be to study the expectations of others without attending to my own. It would be to assume "a view from nowhere," as if I were not part of the reality I was studying or as if I were writing independently of any acquired viewpoint. What, then, do I bring to this study of expectations?

A convenient starting point is to describe some conventional expectations that I internalized and followed for the first two decades of my academic career. Very generally put, I did what my undergraduate and graduate-school professors expected; I mimicked what I saw them and other scholars doing. Both in writing style and in formal argumentation, I copied the models I had encountered. As a dutiful "apprentice," I was assimilating the skills of my "masters." I was following an age-old pattern perhaps first on exhibit in hunter-gatherer tribes. Then new generations borrowed the "lore" of their elders on how to conduct a successful hunt and so improve the lives of their tribes. Of course, the objectives of my academic type of hunt might not have much life in them, e.g. a lengthy dissertation and various scholarly papers. Still, success equaled acceptance of such writings, and earning it required that I meet the conventional expectations in my field.

I single out what was and still is a conventional and largely unquestioned expectation about comparative studies. How many dissertations and journal articles in the humanities relate two or more authors in terms of their views on some shared topic? Whether the figures are intellectual giants of the past or contemporary luminaries, research projects abound comparing, for example, Aristotle and Aquinas, Kant and Hegel, Rawls and Rorty, MacIntyre and Nussbaum. I recall a doctoral student from the University of Texas at Austin telling me that he was writing his dissertation on Nietzsche's view of objectivity in contrast to

² "Generalized empirical method operates on a combination of both the data of sense and the data of consciousness; it does not treat of objects without taking into account the corresponding operations of the subject; it does not treat of the subject's operations without taking into account the corresponding objects." "Second Lecture: Religious Knowledge" in *A Third Collection* (New York: Paulist Press, 1985), 141.

Kant's. He was obviously puzzled and unprepared to respond when I asked him: "And what is your understanding of objectivity?"

My question to him had a history. I had studied Nietzsche's works for a number of years. In graduate school I was taught he was a pragmatist. Then Nehamas's popular work introduced me to a view of Nietzsche's "philosophy of the future" as akin to literature. A few years later I read about scholars defending a view of him as a neo-Kantian. This shifting of views gave rise to a suspicion. Much like the fashion industry, was professional philosophy little more than a periodic parade of the latest intellectual fad? Around the same time, debates about whether Kuhn really denied all scientific progress added to my suspicion that philosophers engaged in endless debates, settled few questions and seemed content with the status quo. Was the "hunting lore" my elders had passed on to me a set of skills ineffective in improving any tribe's situation?

A further debate solidified my suspicions. I had read enough about the practice of medicine to know that there was a long history of medical diagnostics and therapeutics. While there have been plenty of cultural and historical variations in understanding and treating diseases, there has been progress in effectively curing some of them. Although historians could write of different schools or traditions of medical science, they did not resign themselves to endless debates among schools of thought. They could point to some questions that had been settled and some lives that had been improved. In contrast, I found some thinkers in the humanities embracing an intellectual resignation to permanent ineffectiveness. Of course this is not how they worded their stance. The usual wording first mentioned that the humanities could never be sciences and then added a rationale. One variant was that the humanities explored the making of meanings people live by, i.e. their cultural narratives about where they came from and where they were going. These moral-aesthetic constructs are not natural entities that inquirers can observe, not to mention measure with any precision. Thus, the sciences made progress in understanding objective situations, but the humanities served a more limited, though valuable, purpose in exploring human possibilities, in dreaming of new ways of thinking and living.³

You might wonder whether implicit viewpoints are guiding this rationale. Is a narrow empiricism dictating what counts as objectively real and is a demand for precise measurement functioning as the standard of reliable knowledge? My suspicion that such hidden assumptions were in charge deepened when I read how some scholars responded to the bifurcation of the humanities and the sciences. They concluded that progress in the natural sciences was undeniable and due largely to their reliance on methods and pursuit of what was invariant. But they asked whether the same could someday be true of human sciences? To share in

³ For a defense of this two-part thesis, see Jerome Bruner's "Possible Castles" in *Actual Minds, Possible Worlds* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986), 44-54.

the prestige of the sciences, they would have to abandon some of their “big” questions that always seemed to provoke endless debates. But perhaps they could settle some issues by copying scientific procedures. The lure of metrics found receptive audiences in historiography (the *Annales* School), in political economy (econometrics), in political science and sociology (demographics).

The goals were multiple and commendable: to put humane studies on a solid foundation (the old Cartesian quest?), to make progress in resolving some disputes, to produce results effectively improving the human condition, to raise the academic status of some disciplines. The general means included some partial imitation of more successful fields of inquiry. But new suspicions arose about this enterprise.

First, academic disciplines that are already low on a pecking order are unlikely to gain serious attention from practitioners in far more successful, scientific fields. Their mimicry is more likely to reinforce the latter’s belief that “we are doing the only serious work, and these imitators are simply admitting as much by their halfway measures.”⁴ The result is likely to be a further confinement of the humanities to a peripheral status in serious inquiries.

Second, hidden assumptions about the meanings of reality, knowing and objectivity continue to control discussions about possible conflicts and convergences among the sciences and humanities. While scientists and scholars ask questions, their focus in inquiry is usually “outward,” i.e. they pay little, if any, attention to their own expectations and performance in raising and answering questions. Much like the novice hunter, they operate as they were taught to operate, and most never detect that their assumptions about the meanings of reality, knowing and objectivity are parts of an uncritically assimilated viewpoint (what Heidegger termed *Vorhaben*). As a result, the persons doing the inquiries remain strangers to themselves and proceed as if science were free of metaphysical assumptions and objectivity were the opposite of subjectivity. From such muddled views much confusion follows.

What is to be done? Lonergan’s answer was: “Some third way... must be found and, even though it is difficult and laborious, that price must be paid if the less successful [disciplines are] not to remain [mediocrities] or slip into decadence and desuetude.”⁵ An intellectual breakthrough of some sort is needed. The alternative is increasing irrelevance of the humanities for those hoping to improve the human story. But what is a way forward? To answer “yes” likely evokes puzzlement in most readers. For readers familiar with Philip McShane’s work, the answer may evoke a smile. Does it help to paraphrase his thematic hope for a few “evolutionary sports

⁴ “Nor will recourse to the analogy of science be of any use, for that analogy, so far from extending a helping hand to the less successful, is content to assign them a lower rank in the pecking order.” Bernard Lonergan. *Method in Theology* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1972), 4.

⁵ *Ibid.*

paying attention to their whatting and finding it isomorphic with the field”? I think understanding his hope here is too much of a leap; certainly it would require more than a brief essay. Instead, let me point out what some readers may have already noticed.

The preceding paragraphs have paralleled the first three paragraphs in the first chapter of Lonergan’s *Method in Theology*. Put in the terms I have been using, conventional expectations are first acquired uncritically. Young persons meet the expectations of elders or teachers and spontaneously mimic their models. If suspicions arise that not all is well with the lore they have internalized, they may seek out different models or masters. Historically, the success of the natural sciences has made its procedures attractive to those dissatisfied with the results of their own disciplines. Imitating those procedures seemed to promise a way forward, but the results have proven disappointing as intellectual muddles continued and the hoped for progress failed to appear.

It may be disheartening to read that there is no remedy without a difficult shift toward serious self-attention. Basic questions, similar to the one I asked the graduate student, may find you puzzled and unprepared to respond. How are you operating in reaching for understanding? Why does your complex performance sometimes lead to knowing? What are the proper objects of your intentional operations?

Perhaps a further parallel will suggest how this “turn to the subject,” this focus on your intentional operations and their intended objects, is within your reach. On page 48 of *Method in Theology*, a diagram appears under the heading of “The Structure of the Good.” The three central lines specify the general conditions for achieving various types of goods. The conditions in the third line identify the grounds for significant changes in expectations.

The first line mentions (1) spontaneous needs that evoke (2) initial operations (3) mediated by forms of social cooperation in the pursuit of (4) particular goods. The earlier example of induction into the lore of a hunter-gatherer society fits this pattern of relationships. Given my focus on comparative interpretation, is there a similar fit? Recall that we initially expect to succeed by mimicking the operations of models. Unquestioned acceptance of the conventions of academic “masters” prepares young scholars to pursue particular goods, e.g. conferral of degrees and success in publishing their work.

Line two cites: (1) the plasticity of human responses to changing conditions that (2) demand new skills and developing understanding so that (3) individuals can fill varied roles in institutional settings and so (4) contribute to the emergence and maintenance of some good of order. When highly specialized tasks become common in developed economies, flexibility in mastering new skills compatible with changes in technology becomes a prerequisite to maintaining all sorts of institutions. Is the same true of keeping pace with new ways of doing comparative interpretation?

Seven co-authored books on the “new comparative interpretation” (aka “dialectic”) have outlined my reading of the demands for changes in

conventional ways of comparing thinkers.⁶ This is not the place to repeat the insights and conclusions of those books. What I do bring to your attention is one diagnosis of deficits in conventional ways of comparison and one remedy for them.

First, the diagnosis has a history. How did it come about that comparative interpretation was not expected to produce little more than interminable debates? What expectations about scholarly work discounted the aim of effectively improving some concrete situation, an aim known to every tribe's youngsters learning to hunt? Some trace this shift in expectations to Aristotle's reflections on political order. Plato had written of politics as the art of soul-making, and his most famous student explored the question of whether character formation was an appropriate topic of politics.⁷ Still, Aristotle's ideal of science followed the successful Euclidean model of his day. It was an axiomatic system, and, while Aristotle did not slavishly follow the model, later thinkers came to expect a scientific study of political order would conform to it. This expectation put political theorizing on a road that would gradually exclude moral decision-making from science.

How so? Well, ask yourself: Can you envision an axiomatic system within which persons could deduce specific judgments about what they should do in specific situations? Perhaps you are aware of two dubious attempts to move from moral or legal generalities to specific judgments. In the late Middle Ages and for several centuries afterwards, there was a moral manual tradition in the Roman Catholic Church instructing confessors on what penances to assign to what types of sins. More recently legislation in the United States restricted the discretion of judges in sentencing defendants who had been found guilty. Mandatory sentencing guidelines assigned ranges of penalties for similar crimes, and judges had to fit their sentences within those ranges. You might be amused by the moral manual tradition, but was it any more mistaken than the more recent practice? Did they both share a common oversight?

⁶ William Zanardi. *The New Comparative Interpretation: A Primer*. 2nd, revised edition (Austin: Forty Acres Press, 2014). Clayton Shoppa and William Zanardi. *Cracking the Case: Exercises in the New Comparative Interpretation* (Austin: Forty Acres Press, 2014). Clayton Shoppa and William Zanardi. *What Is an Environment? A Study in the New Comparative Interpretation* (Austin: Forty Acres Press, 2015).

William Zanardi. *The Education of Liberty: Fantasies about the Future* (Austin: Forty Acres Press, 2016). R.G. Aaron Mundine, Clayton Shoppa and William Zanardi. *Comparing Philosophical Methods: A Way Forward* (Austin: Forty Acres Press, 2017).

William Zanardi. *Rescuing Ethics from Philosophers* (Austin: Forty Acres Press, 2018). William Zanardi. *Raising Expectations: A Fantasy about Future Developments* (Austin: Forty Acres Press, 2019).

⁷ Or at least an admirer who composed the *Magna Moralia* attributed this view to his master.

Consider how mandatory sentencing guidelines ignore relevant significant differences among cases. Equity law was supposed to take such differences into account since laws were generalities that could not anticipate all the variations among particular cases. Yet the moral manual tradition and the much later mandatory sentencing policies ignored relevant variables because they had a different priority. Consistency took precedence over equity.⁸ Similar penances and penalties should follow upon similar offenses. What was lost or overlooked was that actually doing some good thing or some evil thing is concrete – a particular person with a determinate history does a specific act under specific conditions. The numerous variables associated with the act cannot be anticipated by any generality.⁹ Now an axiomatic model cannot handle this vast indeterminacy. To retain the model, then, you will have to pay a price, namely, losing touch with reality.

The loss is identifiable. Political or ethical theorizing must confine itself to types of intentional acts that stop short of acts of deciding what is good to do in a specific case. Scholars wedded to an axiomatic model can ask questions about what has been done, what effects followed, what evidence supports their conclusions, what types of policies different ethical and legal theories would support and how probable various types of outcomes are. If they are careful, however, they avoid asking what they should actually do in a specific case.¹⁰ They may venture “personal opinions,” but they will be just that and no more.¹¹

⁸ In the moral manual tradition a background problem was the lack of education among the clergy hearing confessions. Thus, the standardization of penances improved consistency. As for mandatory sentencing guidelines, while some proponents anticipated they would lessen racial bias in the courts, they actually won popular approval when “being tough on crime” became *de rigueur* if politicians hoped to be re-elected. Judicial discretion was blamed for notorious cases of recidivism and so became a target of political opportunists. Mandatory sentencing guidelines followed, but decades later the economic costs of incarceration rates were a price that reality imposed on political folly.

⁹ I take this to be an implication of saying that classical laws in the sciences are “abstract.” They prescind from actual cases and formulate what will occur under ideal conditions when only a limited number of variables interact. Thus, they usually have the appended clause: “all other things being equal.”

¹⁰ In practice some scholars do try to answer this question. Their usual error is to move from statistical generalities to predictions about individual cases. The same error currently appears among those advocating the use of algorithms to determine bail amounts for defendants in some state courts. They do so to avoid the racial and economic biases often attending determinations of bail amounts. But is this remedy an illusion of impartiality if it ignores relevant variables?

¹¹ Why “no more” than personal opinions? Does this view already assume a model of science that rules out virtuous acts as appropriate matters for scientific inquiry? You have no doubt heard remarks about a time lag between

This digression on a model of science and its consequences was intended to serve two purposes. First, it diagnoses an inherited viewpoint that you should question even if to date you have not. To detect problems with it is to have an experience of personal disenchantment with at least some expectations you once might have taken for granted. The digression might serve, then, to prompt a further question: What else have I taken for granted that might be wrongheaded? A second purpose is to introduce the third line of terms in the diagram and to identify their functions in evaluating and perhaps correcting deficits in actual institutional arrangements or goods of order. The two purposes are self-reinforcing. To detect missteps in prior expectations is to be open to criticisms of and corrections of current ones. But how do we ever depart from what we have taken for granted?

Line three in the diagram contains the terms “liberty,” “orientation,” “conversion” (aka “displacement”), “personal relations,” and “terminal value.” When I first read this display of terms on page 48 many years ago, I had little appreciation of what they meant. Only much later did I discover that they were correlative terms representing an explanatory understanding of social orders, their preconditions and sources of development. So let me try to share some of what I have come to understand about these terms.

I wrote a book on the first term “liberty.”¹² The model of science described above leaves decisions about justifiable courses of action to the discretion of individuals; personal choices are not topics of scientific inquiry. But what if liberty as discretion can become ordered liberty? This is not the place to repeat my earlier analyses of the differences between these two types of liberty. The eventual meaning of ordered liberty was “the capacity of intentional acts to respond to the mediated demand of the principle of completion in ways that develop or correct the antecedent conditions for those acts.” To most readers this series of terms will undoubtedly seem baffling. I cannot summarize the lengthy research in the neurosciences, social psychology and intentionality theory that led to this strange formulation of a normative meaning of liberty. What I can emphasize is the word “capacity.” You and I have the capacity to depart from “antecedent conditions,” e.g. to develop beyond our original expectations about what it means to compare different positions, views or options. We can discover flaws in what others have taught us, in what institutional practices have required of us, in what we have taken for granted about scholarly and scientific practices. Actually exercising this

technology and wisdom i.e. what we are technically able to do exceeds our understanding of what we should do. Is this gap obvious? Are you resigned to it? Is the gap a symptom of a misstep in a conventional understanding of science and a missed development in understanding what science might yet become?

¹² *A Theory of Ordered Liberty*. 2nd, revised edition (Austin: Forty Acres Press, 2011).

capacity can produce differences in how we cooperate with others, what judgments we make about institutions and what ends we pursue. In some cases these differences can amount to a radical departure from prior expectations and may lead to improvements in personal and social practices.

But recall the exclusion of questions for decision from a once unquestioned model of science. Are acts of deciding always to be excluded or might the search for “some third way” bring them within the purview of a new ideal of science? A single essay can do little more than indicate the broad features of such a new model. One commentator on an early version of this essay likened the emergence of this new ideal to the developments from Faraday to the light bulb and then on to electrical power grids. He went on to compare the task to envisioning a future science of economics. He assumed a scientific analysis of anything is concerned with what applies to all members of a class of objects; however, contemporary economics is largely attentive to the well-being of middle and upper classes in market economies. It is as if economists studied families but paid attention only to members who were prospering and ignored those who were starving. How arbitrary and unrepresentative would the results of such an analysis be? How reliable would those results be as the basis for policy decisions aimed at improving family life?

Back we come to the question for decision, but now you might wonder how to relate it to the terms in line three of the diagram. Suppose our focus is on three of them: “orientation,” “displacement” and “terminal value.” An extended example may help uncover the implicit role of acts of deciding in regard to these terms.

What are some different ways persons relate to their jobs or roles in institutions? For some the job is little more than a paycheck, a way to earn a living. For others the institution represents a means to a much broader social good. It may be the financial security an insurance company provides its policyholders, the health benefits a medical clinic delivers to a local community, the aesthetic enjoyment a symphony gives its audiences, the educational opportunities a school system supplies to generations of students. When employees perceive that filling their roles serves such good ends, they likely identify with the institution and their fellow employees and willingly make personal sacrifices to sustain the institution and to assist others in the workplace.

A minimal precondition to sustaining any institution is for persons to routinely decide to fill their roles in it. High absentee rates signal that not all is well in a workforce. In contrast, when workers respond to a crisis at work by volunteering to come in on their day off, you can surmise their loyalty to the group and its purposes is strong. What has this to do with the terms from line three? Well, note a possible change in orientation from just picking up a paycheck to valuing an institution because of the good ends it serves. The shift from one orientation to the other may be sudden or gradual; in a few cases it may be a radical displacement from an original

mindset.¹³ The movie “Schindler’s List” depicts a gradual but ultimately dramatic displacement from the main character’s original monetary purposes and range of caring. His terminal value became protecting the lives of his Jewish workers. For their sake he risked his own life and exhausted all the wealth he had accumulated.

Developments in academic orientations tend to be far less radical. As an example, think of how historical consciousness has affected scholarly and scientific studies over the past two centuries. What began in the Enlightenment period and accelerated among German historians in the nineteenth century was a significant departure from a classicist orientation that assumed the normativity and permanence of western cultural standards. Gradually a new orientation accepted that every concept, theory and discipline had a history. Today those being inducted into a field of inquiry learn its history from its beginnings and advances to its breakdowns and current puzzles. A common expectation is that every science and scholarly field has not only a history but also much unfinished business. When the issues under discussion are complex, inquirers simply assume that they have more to understand, and that includes how to improve their current practices.

All this may seem noncontroversial, but a further implication is not widely recognized; namely, the best anyone can do in an academic field is to pursue developmental accounts of its complex issues and conventional practices. What does this entail? In a recent book I surveyed past and present interpretations of the origins of human aggression.¹⁴ My survey was dependent on the research of anthropologists, historians, neurobiologists and social psychologists. My purpose was to exemplify a new way of comparing different views, in effect lining up those views in a developmental sequence ranging from the least comprehensive to the most comprehensive views to date. My exercise in comparative interpretation followed a new model of interpretation sketched in the second and third chapters of the book. In an already cited book series, several co-authors have been trying to communicate features of this new ideal of scientific interpretation.

Ignoring most of the content of those earlier books, I draw your attention here to how decision-making occurs in composing and applying such a developmental sequence. Comparative interpreters of the future will have to judge the relative comprehensiveness of different interpretations of some issue. They will also have to decide how to rank them in a developmental order. Once such a ranking is widely accepted, it becomes a measure of new interpretations or of recently rediscovered ones. When any view conflicts with the acknowledged best-to-date view

¹³ In *Method in Theology* Lonergan wrote of “orientation” as the “direction of development” and rooted it in the transcendental notions that require us to develop. (51–52) Ultimately, “the spark in our clod [is] our native orientation to the divine.” (103)

¹⁴ *Rescuing Ethics from Philosophers*.

in the sequence, the burden of proof lies with innovators to show how they are correcting or developing the latter. Note the comparison is no longer a matter of directly relating two or more authors to one another but of relating any view on the same issue to a developmental sequence. At a minimum there will be a gain in efficiency by not revisiting already surpassed positions.

But how will these judgments and decisions be more than subjective? How can they be part of a science? Again, the previous books anticipated and responded to both questions in some detail. What I will mention here are several features of comparative interpretation that are partial answers to both questions.¹⁵

The methodological framework for this new form of comparative interpretation is what Lonergan called “functional specialization.”¹⁶ Comparative interpretation, or what Lonergan termed “dialectic,” is the fourth in a series of eight distinct but related specialties. Two characteristics of all the specialties are a division of labor and a recycling of findings among the specialists. Both features already appear in contemporary sciences and operate both as checks on mistaken views and as spurs to further development. The division of labor has proven its worth in industry and medical research. Why should the humanities remain a holdout against increased efficiency? As well, peer review is standard practice in the sciences. The recycling of comparative interpretations among specialists mimics this successful practice and provides an alternative to the intellectual resignation that blames seemingly intractable disagreements on different “schools of thought.”

Yet this new model of scientific interpretation has not gained a broad audience even fifty years after Lonergan first sketched it. What this essay may do is nudge you, the reader, to pay attention to your own scholarly habits. What determinate expectations do you bring to your practice of comparing and evaluating interpretations? Are you suspicious that they need changing? Have you noticed the frequency with which two or more authors are compared directly to one another? Does talk of comparing new views instead to a developmental sequence of interpretations of an issue

¹⁵ They are partial answers because I am leaving out any mention of the critical functions of generalized empirical method, the horizon of theory and the universal viewpoint. They function as checks on (1) the variability of common sense and its language, (2) the intrusion of polymorphic consciousness into public debates and (3) counter-positions on the meanings of reality, knowing and objectivity.

¹⁶ Descriptions of functional specialization (FS) appear repeatedly in the cited book series. Philip McShane’s extensive writings on FS are available at his website: philipmcshane.ca. Michael Shute provided helpful overviews of FS in two journal articles: “Functional Collaboration As the Implementation of Lonergan’s Method.” “Part I: For What Problem is Functional Collaboration the Solution?” and “Part II: How Might We Implement Functional Collaboration?” *Journal of Macrodynamic Analysis* 8 (2015): 67–92, 93–116.

strike you as a promising innovation? If it does, are you willing to experiment with this new practice?

Let me use another analogy to nudge you toward pausing over these questions. I am assuming you have some familiarity with Lawrence Kohlberg's developmental theory of moral reasoning. You might already have detected a parallel between its three "levels" (Pre-conventional, Conventional and Post-conventional, each level having two stages) and what I wrote above about changes in expectations. Thus, an early habit is spontaneous mimicry of those "in authority." We borrow our original expectations about how to think and act from our models. Eventually we learn to make our own decisions, but early socialization, if successful, usually means we will uphold the conventions that maintain some familiar good of order. However, to varying degrees we remain at liberty in regard to our public selves. Private fantasies may be the only place most of us act out our imagined rebellions against some group and its practices, but public departures do occur. Kohlberg, following Kant, did find limited evidence of persons voicing well-reasoned criticisms of group practices. Structural evils of racism, economic deprivation and political or religious intolerance have their conventional rationales, but some persons judge those evils and their rationales in terms of "universal principles;" i.e. they appeal to goods that can only arbitrarily be reserved to just one tribe or some elite within it.

II. Tracking Your Own Expectations

The brief review of Kohlberg's developmental model suggests how you might develop an explicit view on your viewpoints over the years. The model can help you track shifts in your own expectations from (1) those you uncritically assimilated as a child to (2) those you adopted as a young adult out of loyalty to some group and, perhaps, to (3) later ones that reflect a range of caring broader than your group's interests. My main concern here is for what this last shift in caring about others means to you. Only you may know what your range of caring is; anyone else will have to infer it from your words and actions. So how will I proceed in talking about your possible range of caring? First, I can say what I will not do.

Critics noted a problem with Kohlberg's sixth stage of moral reasoning, i.e. the second stage of his Post-conventional level. It is a problem Hegel had much earlier identified in his criticism of Kant's moral philosophy. He charged that Kant relied on purely formal principles for decision-making. Why did Hegel think this was a problem? In contemporary terms, such principles fail to consider (1) the variables in specific situations and (2) the question of which principle, out of a number of possibly relevant ones, is actually pertinent to a specific situation.

At this point I could begin to review the extensive literature that compares Kant and Hegel on this issue. Do you expect me to follow this conventional path? I hope not. Instead, I ask you to think about some implications of an axiomatic model of science. When a similar model of

science guides the construction of an ethical theory, what the builder tends to ignore is that ethical principles are abstract formulations. To know whether one or more of them are relevant to a specific case requires not only an understanding of the principles but also insights into the particular details of the case. This is the diagnosis problem familiar to anyone practicing medicine. Until physicians pay close attention to patients and their symptoms, they do not know what therapies to apply.¹⁷ If they were to proceed to apply a therapy without a diagnosis of patients, what outcomes would you expect? Sometimes there would be beneficial results, often no discernible effects, and too often trips to the morgue.

The diagnosis problem is one basis for the claim that “the good is always concrete.”¹⁸ A healthy patient is such a good, and intelligently pursuing this good end presupposes insights into particulars, insights that mediate between generalities (e.g. therapeutic guidelines) and particular symptoms. So what? How does any of this apply either to questions about expectations or to criticisms of Kant and Kohlberg?

Well, my announced concern was about your habit in caring about others, and the criticisms amounted to the charge that intelligently caring about others requires more than an understanding of moral principles. What the concern and the criticisms share is a common insight that specific populations and their concrete situations take precedence over abstract principles. However, if ethicists emulate an axiomatic model of science, they will likely favor principles that seem to identify what is good or bad for persons under any conditions. While this focus on abstract generalities has been historically attractive to some,¹⁹ it assigns priority to generalities and discounts the labor of diagnosing specific persons in concrete situations. Has your training imparted this priority? Do you suspect there is a problem with it? For example, how much empirical data does it demand?

¹⁷ An insight is sometimes a grasp of the interdependence of particulars. For example, a range of symptoms can be an indicator of multiple diseases. Further testing of patients and insights into the results can narrow the list of possible diseases and ideally isolate the actual one. In this case, insight is a grasp of unity.

¹⁸ *Method in Theology*, 27.

¹⁹ Spinoza and Kant emulated the model. Contemporary deontologists and traditional natural law theorists seem to do the same. However, what if the natural law is the natural longing of humans to make good sense and not nonsense of their lives? A long evolutionary movement toward this end is unlikely to find abstract principles more than guidelines or signposts indicating what predecessors to date have understood about providing more persons with better times. The signposts are useful but not the first or final words on what we might eventually learn about becoming better persons. Of course, a critic could say with Aquinas that the first law is to do good and avoid evil. But how well does this formal principle serve decision-making in specific cases? Does it permit anyone to skip the diagnosis problem?

Back I go to the phrase “terminal value” on line three. If you recall that the function of the terms on that line was adjudicating views about particular goods (e.g. earning a paycheck) or about a good of order (e.g. whether an institution was perpetuating some structural evil), then you might ask about the source of both various goods and judgments about them. If you have detected deficiencies in the axiomatic model, e.g. its estrangement from concrete goods, then you will not seek the source in some set of propositions or principles. There is no substitute for a type of developing subject as the source of judgments and decisions about what is actually good to do. Is this implied by Aristotle’s quip that the good is what the good person does? At least it suggests persons might be sources of what is valued. Thus, they set priorities among particular goods, e.g. health and relaxation over the thrills of extreme sports and the excitement of fast-paced vacations. They construct and maintain the institutional orders that routinely supply jobs and educational opportunities. They sacrifice to preserve terminal values, e.g. religious liberty, friendship and mutual respect for moral equals. Still, persons come into conflict over particular goods and group ends, and even terminal values are multiple and sometimes at odds.

You might assume there must be a hierarchy of terminal values,²⁰ but who determines what it is? All sorts of contemporary debates about human rights are evidence that disagreements about hierarchical orderings of goods are not in short supply. Must a patriarchal society abandon its traditions by extending equal rights to women? Should business owners be permitted to deny services to customers whose life styles offend those owners’ religious convictions? Now if you dream of a political or ethical theory so compelling that any well-intentioned person will accept its ordering of terminal values, you have missed an important distinction. T.S. Eliot did not miss it: “They constantly try to escape / From the darkness outside and within / By dreaming of systems so perfect that no one will need to be good.”²¹ To put his point more prosaically: knowing what is good to do is one thing; doing it is another. At the point of transition are persons who may or may not be willing to act on their best understanding of the good they could do.

Where does this leave us in relation to my question about your expectations? To review: I am supposing the criterion for assessing what you should do in a specific situation is not found in propositions and principles; there is no substitute for a certain type of developing subject as the source of sound judgments and decisions about what is actually good to do. What more can I say about this type of subject, this criterion?

It may not be too helpful if I write about a self-luminous person who consistently responds to the mediated demand of the principle of completion. This, however, is what I meant by a person routinely exhibiting ordered liberty. More accessible may be a description of

²⁰ *Insight*, *CWL* 3, 624–625.

²¹ “Choruses from ‘The Rock’” (VI).

persons intelligently and responsibly pursuing good ends because of their understanding of the best sciences of the day. What I mean is that the best available understanding of their times informs such persons' diagnoses of concrete situations and their evaluations of options. My long-term fantasy here is about persons engaging in acts of deliberating and deciding on the basis of the results of the collaborative efforts of those doing functional specialization. What specialists assemble, compare, criticize and arrange in developmental sequences will someday be a routine basis for personal and collective decision-making. Far more persons, then, would fit the description of the criterion as a type of developing subject.²²

How is this strange criterion relevant to the issue of terminal value? What I am envisioning here is a viewpoint on terminal values that is ideal and still too rare. What is it? To clarify by contrast, it dismisses an earlier confinement of science to the first three types of intentional acts. Instead, it also focuses on acts of deliberating and deciding, particularly when those acts are tinged with fantasies about providing more people with better times. It is not expecting to find principles and laws that substitute for the labor of diagnosing complex situations and inventing ingenious improvements. It is not resigned to interminable debates among schools of thought or to some "darkness within" that precludes the maturation of the species. As a result, it is a developmental viewpoint on viewpoints that dismisses some and revises others. But what can I say more positively about it?

III. Great Expectations

First I will offer a list of what I think are preconditions and obstacles to adopting this viewpoint. In composing the list as a set of my own expectations, I am identifying where I stand on some basic issues. By inviting you, the reader, to be explicit about your own stances on such issues, I am asking you to formulate some of your own determinate expectations and so "appropriate" more of your own viewpoint on these issues.

- (1) I expect that human history will move discontinuously toward better times if persons are repeatedly, even if not consistently, intelligent, reasonable and morally responsible. (In other words, I give a positive answer to McShane's "Amendment A.")²³

²² Admittedly, this is a fantasy, but, unless we operate with some ideal measure, how are we to assess our current expectations and practices?

²³ That is, I take a stand on the intelligibility of human history. McShane's "Amendment A" invites his readers to do the same: "**Do you view your humanity as possibly maturing – in some serious way – or just messing along between good and evil, whatever you think they are?**" *The Everlasting Joy of Being Human* (Vancouver: Axial Publishing, 2013), 80. (Boldface in the original.)

- (2) I expect this positive stance regarding our story will resonate with those whose lives of inquiry rest on an underlying trust that their reaching for understanding is worthwhile.
- (3) I expect adoption of or resistance to this stance will depend on numerous variables, many of which we do not readily acknowledge. In other words, the replacement of an underlying trust by existential angst or the displacement of the latter in favor of the former may depend on unrecognized variables.²⁴
- (4) I expect there will be refusals to answer “Amendment A.” Some will evade this question for decision by saying any positive or negative answer would be a non-scientific, subjective response. Others will assert that the question is not part of their field of study.
- (5) I expect that an adequate developmental view of human responses to the demand for more complete understanding will erode claims that some tradition or school of thought is not open to revision; in time such claims will be seen as temporary fixations or premature halting points.
- (6) I expect that future thinkers will eventually accept that their intentional acts in reaching for understanding are legitimate “objects” of inquiry in all their fields and not some “subjective” component they should ignore.²⁵
- (7) I expect that thinkers will eventually adopt developmental perspectives both on their fields and on their personal expectations and so accept that the “whatness” of fields and persons includes what they may yet become.
- (8) I expect that something similar to functional specialization, with its recycling and refining of developmental sequences of views, will someday be a standard of competence, i.e. what scholars and scientists commonly expect of one another.²⁶

Here you might pause for some days or weeks to formulate where you stand in relation to these eight expectations. Doing so is a way of

²⁴ Consider some of the variables. Does it make a difference whether a society is at peace or at war, economically depressed or prosperous, manifesting high culture or enthralled by mass media and conspicuous consumption? And what of specific individuals? What affectionate gestures were consistently present or absent in their childhoods? Who were their models as they matured?

²⁵ This is consistent with saying the degree of development in a field is dependent on the degree of development of the scholars or scientists in the field. It is also to expect that generalized empirical method will become an “elementary” feature of future scholarship and science.

²⁶ The seven texts cited in footnote 6 offer various reasons defending this expectation.

making explicit what may have remained hidden. It is also a way of confronting in a personal way various questions for decision. The general question is what deliberate and critical stance you should take in relation to both my expectations and your own. Working out an answer is perhaps unsettling because it is a departure from “normal” academic practice. All the same, skipping this exercise comes at a cost, namely, remaining a stranger to yourself. Do you recall the origins of the word “alienation”?²⁷

Suppose you recognize you have been operating with an implicit trust in your reaching for more comprehensive understanding and doing of what is good. Might such reaching represent what is best about the human species? To think of your own life of questioning and acting as representative of a high evolutionary achievement is not too strange.²⁸ But fantasize ahead and things do get strange. It is not much of a reach to think you and the human species have a lot of unfinished business. Strangeness begins to appear when you try to imagine what determinate goal all of this striving, this dynamic evolutionary process, might have. Does it help to suggest that it has no determinate end in advance of the choices people actually make?

Those choices have produced historical advances and declines and are matters of record. A dismal record emphasizing human folly underscores a view of our story as endless oscillations between good and evil. But that is one of a number of views. This essay has been asking what viewpoint you currently have regarding such views. It has also invited you to take a stand on your current expectations about the human capacity to make our story better than it has been. At first you might find your stance on this capacity to be just “one more view.” If you think this is the case, what are you to do? Assuredly, a science of interpretation of viewpoints is a fantasy, but is there any other alternative to endless oscillations among views? Comparative interpretation, when it one day is part of that science, will not amount to much if all that it has to offer are competing interpretations.

Now it may expand your viewpoint on our story if you suspect that, in many fields of inquiry and familiar patterns of living, the human species is still in its infancy. This suspicion favors fantasizing about further developments; it also erodes the seriousness with which you take the economic, political and religious quarrels of the day. But what is the next step? Resignation to endless debates among schools of thought is not a step forward, even if a surcease of intellectual labors makes it an attractive option. Is there another way, “even though it is difficult and laborious”? Envisioning this possibility and choosing to pursue it is decidedly

²⁷ Some views of scholarly objectivity require a type of self-alienation. Criticisms of those views appear in Chapter Three of *The New Comparative Interpretation: A Primer*.

²⁸ “The emergence of humanity is the evolutionary achievement of sowing what among the cosmic molecules.” Philip McShane, *The Allure of the Compelling Genius of History* (Vancouver: Axial Publishing, 2015), 3.

subjective and dependent on multiple variables. Have significant variables in your life promoted your trust that pursuing this possibility is worthwhile? What have some of those variables been? How have they shaped and developed your expectations? Are they of any help in fantasizing about your further development?

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