

## Thinking again about Love, Feelings, and Knowledge of Values in Lonergan

by Br. Dunstan Robidoux OSB

In this brief speculative reflection, I would like to refer to a question which asks about how feeling and knowing are related to each other. We find texts in Lonergan which very clearly indicate that apprehensions of value are found within feelings. They “are given by our feelings.” Cf. Lonergan, *Early Works on Theological Method I*, p. 510. And yet, in the tradition of thought which Lonergan had known and which refers to an Aristotelian-Thomist tradition of thought, feeling is not regarded as a cognitive act. It is said that, according to Aristotle, love is not a feeling but a good deed. There seems to be a change, maybe we can speak about a contradiction, if we say that, in the later Lonergan, it is said that values are apprehended in feelings and then, later on, they are judged through an evaluation which occurs in a judgment of value. It seems that values are not encountered in a direct act of understanding which precedes the making of a judgment about value. Instead of a direct act of understanding as this could exist in our ethical human life, we have feelings and then, from there, we move to judgments of value.

To overcome a sense of discontinuity that we thus find in Lonergan, a question comes to mind however which could point toward a possible solution. In Lonergan's understanding of human cognition, he speaks about a kind of cognition that occurs in our prior acts of sense before we move into another kind of knowing which occurs when we move into acts of understanding (whether we speak about direct acts of understanding or the later emergence of reflective acts of understanding which exist as judgments). Technically speaking, officially, we only have knowledge (true knowledge) in judgment (in reflective acts of understanding) and not in prior acts of sensing and understanding. Yet, in sensing and in direct acts of understanding, we have a kind of knowing which exists within these different acts. In our acts of sense, we become aware of something which is other than ourselves. We often bump into the world that we live in as, physically, we move around within it. And then too, in our acts of direct understanding, we become aware of orders of meaning that transcend what we know or what we encounter as this may be given to us in our prior acts of sense. My point in making these remarks is to indicate that in sense experiencing and in our initial acts of understanding (in our direct acts of understanding), some kind of knowing is occurring although these kinds of knowing all exist at a lower level within the order of our human cognition. Within these prior levels, we do not really know for sure that we really know anything. We grow in familiarity (in the knowing which exists if we want to speak about familiarity) but we are not really sure about what it is that we truly know. Yet, in this knowing, in our sensing and in our direct acts of understanding, we are moving toward a kind of knowing which is to be equated with real knowing and true knowledge. In our prior acts of sensing and understanding, there exists an intending orientation, a suggestive fruitful point of departure which, as orientation and point of departure, points to goods or values which are known indistinctly or inchoately before they can be clearly and truly known.

Saying these things thus, I would like to pose a question. Do our experiences of feeling resemble our experiences of sensing? Sense experience exists at a very early point in our human lives. Without the knowing which first exists in our acts of sensing, we cannot come to understand and know anything about anything. We begin with sensing (our acts of sensing) and it is only later that we can distinguish between our acts of sensing, on the one hand, and our acts of understanding and knowing a reality, on the other hand: a reality which seems to exist within our sensing and which seems also to transcend what it is we are sensing which exists as the prior term of our prior acts of sensing. Our sensing

orientates us toward what we may fully know, to what we may properly know through our later acts of understanding and judging. What is sensed can come to us in patterns that, initially, we do not form or shape. But, the patterns which come to us induce an effect within our experience and our acts of cognition. The prior patterning which exists in the data of sense encourages the reception of a direct act of understanding which apprehends a pattern which exists as a pattern or order which now also exists within our understanding (a pattern which traditionally refers to the presence of a form). From a pattern or regularity that is espied in the data of our senses, we come upon a pattern or patterning which points to a regularity of some kind (a regularity which refers to an intelligible pattern which, as a pattern or order, points to the presence of an intelligible relation or intelligible nature). From a sensible pattern, we move to an intelligible pattern and this patterning, in turn, serves as a point of departure for judgments which can speak about a knowledge of truths which, functioning as a medium, gives to us a knowledge of facts (a knowledge of facts being the same as a partial or incremental knowledge of being).

Turning then to our experience of feeling, our experience of emotions, do our feelings perform a service that is like what is given to us in our acts and data of sense? If, in sensing and the attentiveness which can exist with our sensing, we begin to notice patterns or apt images in our data of sense, do feelings reveal a patterning which exists within ourselves and a patterning that might also exist or point to a world which exists outside ourselves? In our conscious life, prior to any form of self-reflection which can move us from an implicit knowledge of metaphysics to an explicit knowledge of metaphysics, everything is connected in a kind of jumble. Feelings and passions are not clearly distinguished from acts which we do or may do from or out of our feelings (acts which we do in response to the feelings and emotions which we may have). In this type of context, we can more easily identify with a point of view which would say that “we think with our blood.” By way of an example, I quote a proposition which comes to us from the National Socialist movement as this had once flourished in Germany during the 1930s and 1940s.

We can admit, of course, that feelings come to us in ways which are provoked by external causes functioning as stimuli. We can speak about feelings that are provoked or about feelings which are more gently elicited. Our feelings do not exist in a manner that is removed or cut off from influences that come to us from without nor from influences that come to us from the inside (our memories and recollections serving as catalysts). We can be stirred up inside by what is happening in a world that exists externally to ourselves or by our memories about what has been happening in a world which exists externally to ourselves. However, if we attend to the emotional responses which we have, can we not properly speak about a possible patterning which exists amongst these feelings of ours, an emergence of feelings which varies from person to person but which evokes responses that can be seen as characteristic for a given person or characteristic for this other person? In every feeling, certain associations exist. Certain feelings can be more easily aroused in some persons than in others. The arousal of our feelings reveals orientations which exist within ourselves and which we experience within ourselves, orientations which can reveal to us whether or not our feelings exist in a self-transcending kind of way or if our feelings exist in a self-regarding, selfish kind of way.

As in our experiences of sense, our feelings come upon us with an immediacy which resembles the immediacy which is present within our acts of sense. It is not so easy for us to control our feelings when they so quickly and immediately come upon us. We have to struggle a bit. But, as we struggle with our emotions and feelings, we can experience an awareness about what our feelings could be about (what they might mean). Do our feelings, do our emotional reactions, reveal to us what we may highly

value in our lives and what we might most detest in our lives? Our appreciations, our loves, reveal what we value and our feelings of abhorrence and detestation reveal what we have no regard for and would prefer to detest.

Let us thus recall again a distinction which Lonergan draws between implicit metaphysics and explicit metaphysics. If, in the ordinary course of our lives, our acts of knowing and our experience of emotion and feeling are not too clearly distinguished from each other (they penetrate each other), then, in this context, to quote again our aforementioned slogan which comes to us from Nazi Germany, do we not “think with our blood”? Before we think about our judgments of value, before we ask questions about them to determine what they are or to determine what judgments of value should exist for us in our lives, we find that we are living out of beliefs or a knowledge of goods and values that we do not explicitly understand and know. If we attend to the feelings which we may have and, as our feelings are provoked or elicited by external causes, we live and function in a context that acknowledges goods and values that we are already living by. In such a situation, yes, we can say that, in our feelings, there exists patterns, orientations, vectors which reflect or point us toward values or goods that we hold but which we might not be able to speak about or too easily clearly articulate and identify. Prior to inquiries and questions which lead to acts of understanding and acts of evaluation and judgment, in our feelings as in our acts of sense, there does exist a degree or kind of knowing (a familiarity) which can be compared to the kind of meaning which exists in symbols. I refer here to a density of meaning which has not been differentiated or explicated in ways which can speak about how  $x$  relates to  $y$ . In the kind of meaning that we experience in a symbolic way, we experience a depth or degree of affectivity which originates from a source of meaning that points to a good or value that we do not clearly understand and know or which can also point toward a good or a value that we do not clearly understand and know despite the influence which it exerts on us on how we may think and how we may act in the course of our ordinary human living.

For these reasons thus, when I think about the undifferentiated kind of experience which exists when we think about how we exist as symbolic human beings, in this context I can understand why it is not incorrect to speak about an apprehension of values within our experiences of feeling and emotion. Some values exist not as very good values. But, we may not know this until we experience certain humiliations of one kind or another: humiliations which cause us or which encourage us to move to a higher viewpoint when we can begin to see a larger number of variables and a relation which should exist among them. The patterns which we can detect and sense in our feelings reveals goods or values that we are implicitly intending or implicitly appreciating and, in a similar way, the patterns or vectors which exist in our feelings indicate points of origin which exist as goods or values that we treasure or, in some way, hold on to. It is only later on, through critical self-reflection, that we can begin to discern how or why our feelings should not be properly regarded as acts of cognition. It is, of course, always possible for us to use our feelings as if they exist as channels or acts of cognition. We can operate in this way and we often operate in this way. In every single instance, the results are not necessarily disastrous. We live and grow up within a social and cultural context and, within our differing contexts, in our feelings and emotions, values are experienced in a manner which is not more fully understood or well known until we can engage in later forms of inquiry which move us from an implicit sense of being into an experience of being that is shaped by a knowledge of metaphysics. In the shift which occurs, we learn to turn away from apprehensions of meaning that totally rely on the experiences which are present in us when we refer to presences of feeling or emotion. In moving toward judgements of value, we take from what has been given to us in our feelings and emotions and we ask questions that can reshape the contours of what we have come to know. What we value in our feelings and emotions

can turn into something else that we value or appreciate in another kind of way. To take a line of thought that comes to us from Aristotle and Aquinas, we take the good that we spontaneously and yearn for and, through understanding and possible experiences of conversion, we can begin to love and appreciate what we have formerly detested and rejected. Our love shifts in terms of what it now begins to love and appreciate and, with this shift, we can begin to love more fully and deeply even as we experience what pains and sufferings come our way as we change in how we live and love and in what we live, love, and die for.