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Transforming Conflict Through Insight

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TRANSFORMING CONFLICT THROUGH INSIGHT

How to deal with conflict in human relationships and among human communities? How about among the various schools of thought in different disciplines and professions? Is there a “spirituality” of conflict resolution?

This opportunity for faculty development will explore the role of Insight in approaching conflict. It will also explore the possible role that a religious or Catholic university can play in mediating conflict in the world. The seminar will guide participants through a discussion of the book, Transforming Conflict Through Insight, by Kenneth R. Melchin and Cheryl A. Picard (University of Toronto Press, 2008). Insight Theory is a learning-based approach to conflict that draws on the work of Catholic philosopher, Bernard Lonergan. This workshop will show how Insight Theory offers novel resources for the study of conflict in a variety of interpersonal and international contexts.

Since 1998, the Center for Catholic Studies has provided the opportunity for faculty to reflect in depth on topics central to the purpose of teaching and learning at Seton Hall. This seminar is open to all administrators and faculty. Participants who write a short response-essay will receive a stipend of $300. These essays will be collected and made available online at http://scholarship.shu.edu/catholic-studies/. Limited to 22 faculty, preference given to those who have not participated previously in May Seminars.

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Transforming Conflict Through Insight

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Introduction

Naturally, conflict is a prevalent and frequent phenomenon for humans and hence has been important in social studies. It is defined as “an expressed struggle between at least two interdependent parties who perceive incompatible goals, scarce resources, and interference from others in achieving their goals.”¹ As a result of being frequent, conflict is consequential: “violence/death, economic losses, dissatisfaction and trauma.”² Ironically, conflict also provides such opportunities as personal growth, relational development, improved decision making, identifying and addressing problems.³ Agreeably, many communication scholars emphasize that all these effects depend on the way conflict is managed. Therefore there is an eminent need for the research and practice of conflict mediation from a “communication perspective” which places primacy on the message as the focus.⁴ Undoubtedly, the means to express conflict is through “communication (verbal and nonverbal messages); likewise, the means to manage and address conflict is through communication⁵ using either “effective conversation”⁶ or “controlled communication”⁷ techniques. This means that through careful, well-structured, and constructive forms of communication, mediators can turn conflict—a destructive force—into an enriching opportunity, transforming potentially explosive situations into peaceful ones.⁸ In addition to the communicative aspect of conflict resolution, there is another important method that this article will explore: the Insight Mediation Method developed by Canadians Kenneth R. Melchin (Theologian-Ethicist) and Cheryl A. Picard (lawyer) based on Bernard Lonergan’s Insight
Theory. Thus, this paper will analyze the blend of the two methods as a tool for successful conflict mediation using Nigeria as a case study. Why Nigeria?

An overview of Nigerian Crisis

Growing up in that country—the most populous in Africa (almost 170 million people)—my childhood was spent hearing, and my first history book was full of stories, about the 1967 Biafra vs. Nigeria war. What inflamed the conflict was that the Federal government cracked down on the Igbo ethnic group in the East (Christians) over regional leadership. At first, it was seen as a politico-administrative war during which over "one million people died either in battle or because of famine." The war ended with the victory of the government forces, which were dominated by the Northern Hausa-Fulani (Muslims) who subsequently shaped the institutional structure of the country, implicitly making it a Northern vs. Eastern or Muslims vs. Christians war.

Again, my adolescent years were filled with the trauma of Ogoniland/Niger Delta vs. Federal government conflict. Like the Biafra war, what fueled the agitation was that the Ogoni people of the Southeastern region were not able to "determine their own regional economic policy, despite living in the region of the country that is the richest in natural resources" since most if not all of the revenues from the oil were administered by the federal government dominated by Hausa-Fulani elites. Here also, it was a religious war in disguise. It was a war against the infidels in the Southeast by the Northern Muslims (in the country's leadership) who wanted to control everything in the country according to Islamic principles. This was evidenced by the choice of the hangman (a Muslim from the North) who barbarously killed the arrested leaders/activists of Ogoni people for opposing government domination of their oil territory. As
their president Ken Saro-Wiwa was led out from the prison blinded, he cried out: “Why are you people doing this to me? What sort of a nation is this?”

Lamentably, this same question has been asked all my adult years as I am tormented everyday by the news of general mayhem: senseless killings in the name of religion, frequent bombing of Christian churches, kidnappings, government instability, lack of security, corruption and poverty in that “tragedy called Nigeria.” Recently, the chilling story of the abduction of almost 300 helpless school girls (mostly Christians) is still fresh in the ears of millions around the world. To date, their fate is unknown as they are still in the hands of their abductors going through dehumanizing sexual abuse among other atrocious things. Where in the world, except in Nigeria, could anybody imagine that the joy, cultural appreciation and togetherness that the World Cup event brings to everybody around the globe has brought a blood bath, lamentation and misery instead, with the bombing of a soccer viewing center in the Western part of the country. As if that was not enough, around the same time it was on the news that almost 470 Islamic militants were arrested in one of the major commercial and religious cities in the East with their usual intention of bombing the infidels because everybody in the country must become Muslim whether one likes it or not, an ideology that will never work in Nigeria. Listen to this:

Nigeria the greatest Islamo-Christian nation in the world..... There is not a country in the world where you find as many Christians living side by side with as many Muslims within the same country as Nigeria. There are nations with Christians and Muslims but often with one dominant over the other. Even where Christians and Muslims are fairly balanced, the population would be inferior to ours.

So the big question is, in this multifaceted situation where there are atrocities and disorder everywhere, what will be the contribution of the Insight Mediation Method for a better Nigeria?
What is Insight Mediation Method and its importance?

Undeniably, mediation has become part of the fabric of how society deals with differences and conflicts, and it continues to be at the forefront of the choices available when confronted with these challenges. It implies the participation of a third party in negotiations between the parties in conflict. It is usually applied in circumstances in which parties are not willing to meet to negotiate. Thus mediation is suited to conflicts that are more serious and more active, including those in which violence is present like the Nigerian case. In such situations a mediator can act as a substitute for direct contact and as a means of communication also. This communicative aspect, as we shall see later, is what IMM highlights. It involves a “process in which mediators help parties tell their stories, explore underlying interests and concerns, and generate options for solving problems and reaching agreements.” IMM is oriented around the “transformation process,” which helps parties involved to navigate conflicts successfully because it helps them to be open to “genuine wonder, interest, curiosity, and questioning” about the crisis. This “attention” Melchin and Picard observe, “must be careful, it must attend to details, it must expect the unexpected,” since it will eventually lead the parties into a new understanding of what is going on because “to understand new things requires entering into new worlds of feeling, seeing, tasking, and relating.” In my opinion, this is completely lacking in Nigeria, hence the turmoil. Therefore, it is time to start an insightful conversation in that country.

The place of communication in conflict mediation

As mentioned already, the communicative element of mediation is very important and needs more studies. This is so because communication theorists believe that “conflicts are not simply the result of interactions between parties with defined interests. Rather, they are more
complex processes in which the very interests and identities of parties are shaped by the
communication unfolding within conflicts.”19 In this kind of situation everything talks and is
meaningful to the parties involved: words, sounds, symbols, gestures, actions and even silence.
Thus, “if identities and interests are themselves shaped with the dysfunctional communication
patterns of conflict, then developing more constructive patterns of communication could have a
positive effect”20 on the formation of identity and interest too. Therefore, communication during
mediation must be effective. This means the “deliberate conveying and accurate receipt and
interpretation of what was intended ..., and the full employment of information as received and
stored in allocation and re-allocation of values, interests and goals.”21 Consequently, “effective
communication would be relevant even during fighting.”22 For instance, the use of controlled
communication in conflict mediation is to provide the parties with insights into their own
behaviors. Its prime function is to “prepare the ground for negotiation by establishing the
conditions in which negotiation will lead to de-escalation of conflict,” to extend the range of
choices of functional cooperation (experience, understanding, verification, and decision
making), and generally to present the conflict as a problem to be solved and not as a contest to be
won. 23 Hence the importance of effective communication in conflict mediation can never be
over emphasized.

Conclusion

Mindful of the importance of mediation in conflict resolution around the world,
especially in Africa where “anthropologists found that most African societies resolved their
conflicts predominantly by mediation,”24 we advocate IMM because as Melehin and Pichard
eloquenty explained:
It invites us to turn our attention to deeper levels of feelings and values. Insight Mediation invites us to become curious about ourselves and our partners in conflict. It invites us to follow the lead of mediators and probe our own feelings and those of others for insights into the deeper care and threats undergirding our positions. It invites us to wonder whether our values might be pursed in ways that need not threaten those of others. It invites us to resist the urge to demonize our adversaries and to begin imagining them anew, as ordinary persons with cares and concerns like our own. … It requires devoting ourselves to the hard work of developing new habits and skills. It requires that we have the … mind to invite the assistance of third parties – not to do this work for us, but to help us work out solutions for ourselves when we encounter obstacles we cannot surmount on our own. It requires thinking longer-term about the cultural, educational, and media Supports for cultivating these habits and skills on a wider scale. Most important, all of this requires that we admit the significance of citizens doing this work … for democratic societies to function well. We believe that Insight Mediation offers an important corrective to common attitudes.  

The hope that this goal can be achieved rests on the blending of the implementation processes, workshops/conferences, and researches on the Insight Mediation Method, “conflict resolution and communication skills.” Nigeria should give this a try. In fact, it is a startling irony to read that:

Nigeria has been involved in conflict resolution since 1963 when she sent troops to Congo on a peace keeping mission. There are other peace engagements that she has spearheaded such as the peaceful resolution of the differences between Togo and Republic of Benin in 1975. Nigeria equally spearheaded the deployment of troops in Chad during the imbroglio in that country. Nigerian’s leadership role in conflict resolution in Africa was once again manifested in the formation of ECOWAS Monitoring Group (ECOMOG), which was formed for peacekeeping mission in the Liberia crisis. Nigeria was the largest financier of that mission and ECOMOG did not only resolve the conflict in Liberia but also the conflict in Sierra Leone. Nigeria has also played a major role in the conflict in Darfur in Sudan. Nigeria played an important role in ending apartheid regime in South Africa. Nigeria believes in the use of diplomatic means in resolving issue rather than using force.  

Then why is that country unable to help herself out of her longtime conflict? What other evidence will Nigerian leaders need to know that the idea behind all this is mainly religious - killing “on behalf of Allah”? Even though I am not a pessimist, but I wonder how the
application of Insight Mediation Method will work when all that the Northerners (Muslims) want is that Nigeria must become an Islamic State—an ideology the Southerners (Christians) are refuting and hence paying with their lives. The killings and bombings taking place in other parts of the country are monitors to the federal government to join in the Jihad. Therefore, until that sword drops, there may not be time for Nigeria to achieve the “massive psychological transformation eventually leading to exclusive reliance on nonviolent methods for resolving group disputes”29—Insight Mediation Method being one of them. Obviously this is a daunting task, but the best alternative for Nigeria now.

4 Ibid.
5 Ibid.
14 Burton, J. W., Conflict & Communication: The use of controlled communication in international relations, p. 155.
16 Ibid., p. 21.
17 Melchin, K. R., & Picard, C., Transforming Conflict through Insight, p. 22.
18 Ibid., p. 22.
19 Ibid., p. 39.
20 Ibid., p. 40.
21 Burton, J. W., Conflict & Communication: The use of controlled communication in international relations, p. 49.
22 Ibid., p. 50.
23 Burton, J. W., Conflict & Communication: The use of controlled communication in international relations, p. 57.


The Time Not Taken

BETH BLOOM

In preparation for the faculty summer seminar on Lonergan and conflict resolution, I tackled Kenneth Melchín’s essay, “Insight, Religion, and Conflict.” As I struggled with the text, I noticed my mind wandering, and after a short while, I put the essay down and decided to attend the seminar, albeit unprepared. After three days in seminar with Dr. Melchín, I once again attacked the essay. As if I had never before encountered them, Melchín’s words made much sense, and I couldn’t fathom how or why they had seemed so inaccessible. For me, insight and accessibility were the product of time and space—the time I spent with Dr. Melchín and colleagues, and the space I allowed myself to understand the concepts articulated within the essay.

This makes me wonder if the same factors might affect if and how often our students experience insight, and what processes inspire such experience. Can we, through our teaching, help students achieve the openness and level of inquiry that facilitate the learning process? And can learning really exist if insight is absent? It is this same insight that those of us who teach information literacy skills seek; both for ourselves in constructing effective pedagogies-- and for our students, who do not or cannot take the time required to think about their research assignments and projects.

Melchín and Picard’s book\(^1\) and the faculty summer seminar focused on the intersection of insight theory and conflict, in order to expunge the latter. One of the processes that successfully address conflict is the explication or articulation of negative memories and experiences that can easily surface during conflict. According to Melchín, successful mediation
can help neutralize conflict and create alliances between warring parties when participants are made to “de-link” or dissociate themselves from these memories and focus on each other’s expected outcomes as the mediation progresses.²

So how can we as educators mediate students’ inner conflicts regarding their learning or ability to learn? I am concerned about students’ conflicts, both within themselves and in their perceptions about their professors. For example, often students approach librarians to help them interpret and focus on solving research assignments. I might ask a student why s/he has not approached his or her professor for clarification and direction. The student may assert that the professor is unapproachable for any of a number of reasons. But I often wonder if some students avoid a perceived confrontation with their professor because of their inner confusion and conflict about their own abilities and, by association, those of their professors.

Such students seem to possess “misplaced expectations,”³ i.e., “If I ask a stupid question then they will know that I really don’t know what I am supposed to know and will fail me or throw me out of college, and then what will become of me and my life?” This, I believe, is the basis of students’ emerging problems doing research and approaching their research assignments. The conflict within comes from their own expectations that, based on the perceived ease of accessing information on non-academic subjects, the learning process should also be easy. Based on this logic, if such information is that easily accessible by searching Google and like search engines, preparatory learning, which would inform research questions, need not be a priority. However, neither Google nor any other search engine can think for students. And many students become unsure of themselves when they find they need time and space to think.
I would posit that students perceive time as a challenge and not as a means to an end. Indeed, library research has shown that, because they have not taken the time to familiarize themselves with the topic about which they are to write, most undergraduate students are not able to articulate either a search question or search strategy that will yield satisfactory results. So many of them have little or no idea how to begin their research—or have spent hours having found either nothing that makes sense or too much that doesn’t make sense. They jump into databases without a research plan, typing keywords without establishing context.

Let us suppose that we were to ask a student how s/he felt when approaching their latest research assignment and what was their assessment of the quality of their work? Some might admit that their assignment was required, but that they were not invested in, nor did they care about, the topic. Others might concede that they were confused and often looked for shortcuts that would supposedly mask their perceived deficiencies. We must ask them if or when they reached a point where they lost interest, or felt unsure or confused about their ability to complete their work. Did this experience affect their expectations about their ability to understand their coursework in general?

This could open up a discussion about why the students attended the university. What was their vision about who they would be after graduation? Secondarily, what was their perception of college faculty—who they were as professors—as people? Did the students see their teachers as facilitators of—or barriers to—learning? Were their teachers truly unapproachable, or was that perception related to past negative experiences?

Ultimately, the conversation could lead to a discussion about insight as a function of the learning experience; i.e., how did students feel when they suddenly understood something that
had previously made no sense? How did time and relaxation contribute to this experience? If students recognized that this sense of understanding and success could become a common event during their college experience, if they allowed themselves time for reflection, might the quest for insight alter the students’ approaches toward their coursework?

Our students must be disabused of the idea that learning and research are easily achieved. We must emphasize the point that everyone has a right to their own time and space to think and reflect, because that is the secret to academic and personal success.

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2 Melchin and Picard, p. 96.
3 Ibid.
From Resolution to Insight: An Appreciation for a Transformative Focus on Conflict

JAMES K. DALY

I co-founded The New Jersey Center for Civic Education (the Center) back in 1990. Several years ago we began to explore conflict resolution as an area for investigation by educators. We were trained by experts from conflict resolution centers at both Harvard University and at Rutgers University. Educators from throughout the State were keenly interested in ways to address conflict. Then several years ago the Center for Global Education at Seton Hall, in the College of Education and Human Services, received a grant to administer the Deliberating in a Democracy program. The core of the project was to address topics of global concern and conflict. The data gathered from participating schools suggests that the work was significant (http://www.did.deliberating.org/about_us/index.html#Evaluation).

I began to infuse deliberation with its concentration on conflict resolution skills and strategies into courses here at the university. Working with universities in Ukraine and Lithuania the objective is that teacher education candidates will be able to seamlessly infuse into their lessons opportunities for young people to reflect on conflict.

None of this work in anyway made me or my colleagues experts, but it did become an area of interest. Thus I signed up for the seminar.

From the very beginning it was evident that this experience was considerably different from those I have previously had.
With the current focus on science, technology, engineering, and mathematics, the text provided a refreshing focus on a different context. I found the attention given to democratic society and the inevitability of and potential beneficial consequences provided by conflict of interest. There is a wealth of data going back to the very founding of common schools suggesting that conflict is controversial and that controversy is not well addressed in schools. Hess explores both the history of controversy in schools and the need for discussion in classrooms.\textsuperscript{1} The focus of much work is resolution, yet I found the shift to the concept of transformation offered by the text, and in the seminar sessions, to be significant. In conflict settings, as we seek to move forward, the disequilibrium potentially encountered by considering possibilities previously not examined as a force for learning. The text cites Lonergan’s contention that as we examine ourselves and our acts during this exploration of alternative perspectives we change, we learn.\textsuperscript{2} It appears that this is a reciprocal experience, in which those with whom we are exploring areas of conflict change us and are changed by us. This reciprocity appears to be on-going, with each set of learnings changing the context in which the exploration is occurring.

The role of questioning, verification, deciding, judging, and understanding within the framework of fact and action is intriguing. Again, my sense of the operations suggests that our active attention to what is occurring moves us into an ever expanding and amorphous arena for thought and eventually action. Change inspires change, with new possibilities opening before those attentively engaged. Essential, it seems, is the process of self-reflection and actively seeking understanding. The process seems similar in some respects to a double de-briefing in a lesson (in a teacher preparation class this might be a period of reflection on the content of the lesson and then a focus on the strategy used). In some deliberation settings this self reflection and active seeking of understanding seems similar to the process of quieting the impulse to speak.
or respond when others are presenting their positions. Active listening is a difficult skill to teach, for even when not speaking our minds are often engaged in silent debate. The deliberation model often then provides for the listener to re-state the essential contentions of those to whom they have been listening. In the transformative model this appears to be the process of seeking understanding. The text indicates that all of this is the act of insight. The key role that questioning plays throughout this process is interesting. It is an active participatory action which expands the potential for new information and understanding which opens up the possibility of insight. The active listening to the statements of others can lead to a curiosity – to a genuine desire to know, and to respond to that knowledge, of what the other participant thinks, believes and needs. In my office I have a sign on which is written ‘how much of what you know is wrong?’ A willingness to be wrong seems important to insight, if combined with a desire to learn.

With widespread diversity comes tremendous opportunity for conflict, and we often head into such conflict with a great deal of what we know being incorrect. For many reasons we often see others from the knowledge we have of the group. Increasing diversity does not necessarily increase our questioning, listening or learning. Eaton and Chirichigno cite studies which indicate that diversity in schools does not carry much long term benefit to society. The report, however, goes on to indicate that the school climate and the level of inclusion and equal participation helps develop skills essential to success and comfort in racially diverse groups. Thus, in diverse settings, something more than the diversity itself is needed to help people learn from the conflicts which emerge from differences, both real and imagined. It seems to me that examining Lonergan’s approach to conflict would be transformative for individuals, and offer consequences beneficial to groups.
We need to promote insight as a consequence of examining conflict for our students. Key for me is the contention that information is not insight. We can know a great deal, but that leaves us only with knowledge. According to the Melchin and Picard text the process involves experiencing, understanding, verification and action. A conscious focus on the processes of transforming conflict into insight is one worth additional reflection, and action, in classrooms at every level.

5 Ibid. p. 52.
Transforming Conflict Through Insight: Perspectives of a Pastoral Theologian

ZENI FOX

Introduction

Some years ago, my department crafted a description of pastoral theology: it is “that branch of theology which serves a mediating function between branches of theology and the pastoral practice of individual ministers and communities of faith.” We further stated that the method used “draws on our Catholic tradition, the resources of the larger culture and the experience of the minister and the community.” In this paper, I will use this method in exploring the concepts presented in the seminar, and outline ways of applying these concepts in one of my courses.

Personal Experience: Conflict And Communion

I begin with experience, both because in pastoral work the experience of each person is a tool for ministry, and because starting here sometimes helps to uncover biases. I participated in the seminar because of a long interest in the topic of conflict resolution, rooted in a deep dispositional and theological valuing of communion. I grew up in a family where the importance of maintaining unity was taught with maxims such as “You can disagree without being disagreeable” and “In my house, I want peace among us.” (Of course, this meant that at times conflicts were not constructively confronted, and skill in doing so not developed.) Even as a teenager, my favorite hymn was *Ubi Caritas* (then in Latin): “Where charity and love prevail, there God is truly found.” As a young adult studying the Trinity, encountering the beauty of the idea of Father, Son and Holy Spirit sharing a life of deep communion captivated me, and remains a deeply motivating theological concept.
In my work in the Church, first as a pastoral minister, later as a teacher, I became aware of the conflicts that sometimes arise between clergy and lay ecclesial ministers, and surmised that this was due to their not understanding each other since in so many ways they move in separate worlds. In recent years, I have become more aware of conflicts between older and younger priests, so called “Vatican II priests” and “Pope John Paul II priests.” Some of my teaching goals (not stated in my syllabus, but consciously informing the ways I developed courses, both in content and method) sought to elicit greater understanding and appreciation of “the other.” (Reading the summary of the many ways in which social scientists seek to validate the effect of their interventions presented me with a challenge - how can I assess student learning, growth, insight, in this area? This needs exploration at another time.) I also included conflict as a topic in some of my courses, focusing on such areas as personal style in dealing with conflict (accommodation, avoidance, etc.), analysis of sources of conflict (including values) and reflection on the varied ways in which Jesus engaged conflict. However, I now see a deeper dimension to explore.

**Insights From Lonergan**

A key learning (an insight? - I wonder, is this deep enough now within me to be so named?) from reading and hearing Melchin was the centrality of feelings elicited because of threats and cares in the work of conflict resolution. In terms of my former way of working to assist students, this suggests a need to move from primarily seeking to facilitate understanding to seeking to facilitate presence and compassion. I will apply this further below.

Another key learning is the important role of religion in helping us to be disposed so that the self-transcendence required for each conflict to be resolved, forgiven, healed, is present.
Teaching as I do at a seminary, I can rely on the fact that the various ways in which the living of faith are engaged by our students will assist in this – even as I accept that in the students, as in myself, there is need for the ongoing conversion that is at the heart of self-transcendence. This perspective strengthens my hopefulness for the deepening of communion among all members of the Church – the path toward resolving the varied conflicts we encounter.

**One Application To Teaching**

In my Ministry of Teaching course, one topic is the collaborative nature of the ministry of Christian formation, of adults and children. One method I have used to assist the seminarians in their understanding of “the other” is a panel of persons with varied roles in formation, always including a few lay persons, and a priest. The panel as a whole is a part of my method toward my goal, but more importantly the “round-robin” in the second half of the class when each panelist meets with small groups of the students, so that a more personal encounter can occur. The goal was understanding. The modification that I will make is to ask each panelist to share something of his/her vocation story and goal in the ministry of teaching. This will move the conversation to the level of cares, and, indirectly, of feelings.

A second method I have used is role playing. In fishbowl style, a smaller group of the class is assigned the roles of people on a parish staff, and asked to develop a plan for the formation of adults for the coming year. I develop a brief description of the staff members - some background, and that each is a nice person. What I will add to this description is information about the hopes and cares that each has for the formation of adults. Hopefully, this will elicit a greater depth in the conversation, and a fuller “encounter” with the other.
These are very small initiatives, but like seeds, I hope they will bear fruit beyond their smallness.

1 Developed by the Department of Pastoral Theology, Moral Theology and Canon Law, Spring, 1997.
3 Recent research indicates that this is an issue now, perhaps even more so than in the past. "(T)here are some indications that the attitudes of the more recently ordained cohort may be less accepting of collaborating with women in Church ministry... These newer priests are also less likely than older cohorts to agree that parish life would be aided by an increase in full-time professional lay ecclesial ministers...." Gautier, M. et al., *Same Call, Different Men* (Liturgical Press: Collegeville, MN, 2012), 85-86.
Fact: Verifying/Judging Based On Evidence But By Whom?

OMER GOKCEKUS

A graduate of the prestigious University of California Davis oenology program, he is a more than capable wine maker. This year, he was particularly blessed with exceptionally good growing and harvesting conditions in the Willamette Valley, Oregon, where his winery is located. There was just the right amount of rainfall, number of days with sunshine, and ideal day and night temperatures throughout the season. He worked hard in his twentieth season as a wine maker. All in all, he feels comfortable; he believes that this year he managed to bottle “the best” pinot noir wine of his career. Knowing that the wine he bottled this year is better than the wine he bottled in previous years makes him feel comfortable. He trusts his judgment, yet he is nervous. After all, wine by nature is an experiential good; its quality is not observable by a wine buyer ex ante. Thus, as a wine maker, he understands that well-qualified others have to verify the accuracy of his assessment before he sets a deservedly high price for his wine.

Every wine maker likes to think that their wine is the best; and, therefore, that wine buyers should pay a hefty price for their wines. Every winemaker would like to charge the highest conceivable price, yet, every consumer would like to pay the lowest possible price. Thus, there is a tension - a conflict of interest between wine producers and wine drinkers. In a sense, it is necessary that independent, well-established, and, at the same time, well-qualified experts provide the necessary verification, judging the quality of a bottle of wine. As a matter of fact, wine markets rely heavily on the experts’ evaluation when deciding the price. Wine ratings by
experts are usually provided as points within a range, e.g., a 50-100 point scale; and the price of a bottle of a pinot noir wine from Oregon’s Willamette Valley AVA, on average, goes up by six dollars with each additional point (out of the 100-point scale).

Two things related to wine and wine drinkers make the third party’s verification particularly necessary: first, by its nature, wine is an experiential good whose quality is not directly observable *ex ante*. A wine buyer has to buy and uncork a bottle of wine to find out how good it is. Second, a wine buyer is risk averse. The average wine buyer faces the (somewhat daunting) task of choosing a bottle of wine based on a set of intrinsic and extrinsic cues. Such cues include the wine maker’s reputation, whether the grapes are from a single vineyard, the overall reputation of the wine’s region, and most importantly, its expert rating. Wine buyers pay attention to wine makers’ reputations and the overall reputation of a wine’s origin, and accordingly (to minimize the risk) are willing to pay an additional premium for them in addition to the premium allocated to expert ratings.² For our wine maker, his reputation and regional reputation are constant. Thus, everything boils down to what the expert’s rating is going to be.

Currently, there are 312 Masters of Wine (MW). To be qualified as an MW, a candidate should be successful in the blind tasting of 36 wines (practical test); write four papers on the production and handling of wine, the business of wine, and contemporary issues (theory exam), and conduct research to prepare a 10,000 word paper (dissertation).³ In addition to these experts, there are “super tasters” such as Robert Parker, Jancis Robinson, Stephan Tanzer and a few others at *Decanter, Wine Spectator, Wine Advocate*, and *Wine Enthusiast*—wine magazines with
wide readership. Indeed, these people know their stuff. Moreover, they all use the same criteria to evaluate a bottle of wine.

The experts describe a wine through twelve categories. These categories are body, yeast, style, tannin, acidity, alcohol, spice, fruit, flower, herb, oak, and inorganic. In these categories there are 120 words or expressions to precisely describe a wine. For instance, the body category is defined by twenty-five different, non-overlapping descriptors: thin, cliff-edge, hollow, mellow, short, austere, angular, delicate, elegant, light-bodied, finesse, closed, polished, complex, full-bodied, tight, firm, powerful, concentrated, dense, opulent, rich, extracted, flabby, and fat. Each descriptor has a very precise meaning. To give a couple of examples, thin means “a wine that has acidity but little substance” and fat means “a wine with fruit but no acidity or tannin.”

Despite the fact that the experts who are rating a wine 1) are all well-qualified and 2) describe a wine in the same twelve categories by using the precise, identical, non-overlapping descriptors, there is no guarantee that they are all going to verify/judge the quality of the same wine similarly. As a case in point, let’s look at the ratings of a 2008 vintage pinot noir from Willamette Valley, Chehalem 3 Vineyard Pinot Noir 2008. This wine was independently evaluated by four different experts and each expert rated the same wine differently: 87 points by Robert Parker of Wine Advocate, 88 points by the expert of the Wine Enthusiast, 90 points by Stephan Tanzer of International Wine Cellar, and 91 points by the expert of the Wine Spectator. Four influential experts and four different verifications of the quality of the same wine!
Once we recall the relationship between expert-assigned points and price for a Willamette Valley pinot noir—by each additional point the price goes up by six dollars—we could better understand the nervousness of our wine maker. He has 3,000 bottles of wine; depending on which expert’s judgment he takes into account in setting the price, he may end up making 72 thousand dollars more or less! To express it in terms of Lonergan’s structure of cognitional operations, experiencing and understanding the wine is done by the wine maker; but verifying/judging the wine is done by the experts. Yet, the verifying and judging by the experts are not always consistent with the wine makers understanding. Even though the experts are all well-qualified and use the same criteria in evaluating a wine, experts’ judgments are not necessarily uniform either. Consequently, based on “fact,” answering the question “what is next?” deciding the appropriate price, becomes exceedingly difficult and hard to make, but most importantly costly, even in a mundane wine business.

1 There is an extensive literature on experts’ importance in different markets, e.g., see Ginsburg, V. (2003). Awards, success and aesthetic quality in the arts. *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 17, 99–111.
3 For details, visit the official website of The Institute of Masters of Wine, [www.mastersofwine.org](http://www.mastersofwine.org).
Conflict Resolution and Social Practice

ANTHONY L. HAYNOR

I have given a lot of thought during the past two decades to the social problem-solving process, and have produced a book on the subject.¹ I argued in that work that human scientists, in their commitment to social problem-solving, aspire to be practitioners and that all practice professions (whether medicine, law, psychotherapy, social work, or social practice) require a “method,” that is, a sequence of steps with an organic and logical integrity.

Conflict, I concluded, becomes a critical focus of a social practice method. We begin with the recognition that social actors may very well have different “adaptive quests,” or make (to draw on the social constructionist tradition) very different “claims.”² These claims may be “complementary” (different yet compatible) or “divergent” (discrepant and irreconcilable). This is what I called the “precontextualization” stage of social problem-solving, at which the cognitive maps of the respective stakeholders are identified, put on the table, as it were. The claims asserted are of three types. First, there is a problematic condition (in cybernetic control language, a discrepancy between a reality state and an ideal state). Second, there is a “putative” cause, that is, something or someone to which or to whom responsibility for the condition is attributed. Third, there is the intervention (commonly a change in law or policy) that should be undertaken by an authoritative entity (e.g. a governing body) to redress the putative cause thereby reducing or eliminating the discrepancy between the reality and the ideal.

The next phase is “contextualization,” in which the human scientist serves a facilitating role in constructing an adequate and comprehensive cognitive map of the issue at hand. Claims-
making is an attempt to make sense of the data to which they are attentive, expressed in terms of insights and formulations. (In this sense, claims go beyond “common-sense” knowledge in that they are given formal expression rather than being implicit, practical, and pre-theoretical in nature.)³ The human scientist’s charge is to help sort out and cast light on these assertions. Are they valid? Can they be verified and validated? In terms of the cognitive operations put forward by Lonergan, what is involved here is a judgment of fact. The development of a working cognitive map is a project in which the human scientist is engaged in conjunction with the claims-makers. This is a collaborative effort, the fruit of a communicative process. Thus, the human scientist does not fall into the category of a pure “adjudicator,” that is, an authoritative expert speaking from Mount Olympus, as it were. Neither does the category of a pure “mediator” seemingly apply, for this designation suggests that the practitioner facilitate a resolution of the disparate cognitive maps by identifying common ground and getting the claims-makers to recognize that commonality.⁴ This is no doubt “transformative,” but not in the broadest sense of the term. There is a huge difference between a scenario in which claims-makers figure out (with the assistance of a mediator) how they could play a win-win game, and one in which the claims-makers work off of an expanded and comprehensive cognitive map, one that the human scientist is particularly and arguably uniquely positioned to analyze. The human scientist can train claims-makers to “think in systems,”⁵ that is, to understand how the elements that make up the social order are interrelated, and also to analyze the various “stocks” and “flows,” as well as the “feedback loops” that characterize the relationships among system elements. Self-transcendence requires full comprehension of the relevant social matrix, and a human scientist trained in systems theory will play an indispensable role in constructing it and then sharing it with all claims-makers. This is necessarily a collaborative process in two senses.
First, claims-makers provide perspectives (that is, cognitive maps) that can serve as useful input for the development of a social matrix. Second, in order for the social problem-solving process to bear fruit it is necessary for claims-makers to appropriate the comprehensive cognitive map put forward by the human scientist for their consideration.

The third phase of the social problem-solving process is decontextualization. The focus here is on making a judgment of value. While contextualization involves intellectual conversion or transcendence, decontextualization involves moral conversion or transcendence. The key question at this stage is: Is the social matrix a desirable one, or does it fail to realize a value that all relevant claims-makers embrace? To decontextualize is to stand back from the existing social arrangements, patterns, and structures (as well as the vested interests supported by them) and subject them to critical scrutiny on the basis of evaluative criteria to which stakeholders can assent. Decontextualization involves the search for foundational principles to which the social order can and should aspire. It is at its core an imaginary project, one that is open to an alternative (and superior) social matrix. Decontextualization thus represents a profound decentering from established social practices, and a ready willingness to consider new ones.

Finally, there is recontextualization. If it is determined that a new social matrix needs to be created, one that is more in line with cherished communal values, then there is the instrumental task of how specifically to bring it into existence. This requires agreement on the leverage points in the system on which to operate to effect a change in the existing social matrix.
The four stage model clearly parallels Lonergan’s cognitional operations.\textsuperscript{6} The formulations put forward by claims-makers to make sense of data to which they are attentive are subjected to critical assessment by human scientists. The effort to develop a comprehensive and adequate cognitive map requires that our attentiveness be expanded. It also requires that competing cognitive maps be juxtaposed. Attentiveness to all relevant data and the juxtaposing of rival formulations provide the best opportunity to arrive at a verified understanding of the social matrix. A judgment of value follows logically from the establishment of fact. Finally, this ushers in an examination of possible courses of action when it is determined that the established social matrix needs to be transformed.

The conflict resolution model put forward by Melchin and Picard (one that draws heavily on Lonergan’s insight theory) offers insights that need to be incorporated into the social practice method sketched above. Among them is the importance of understanding and removing the emotional barriers to openness to new data, new formulations, and new social matrices. Claims-makers can establish linkages (often revolving around the putative cause of a given condition) in which they become affectively invested. Reframing such linkages as hypotheses rather than as objective certainties is critical to genuine inter-subjectivity.\textsuperscript{7} The human scientist can play an instrumental role in getting claims-makers to begin to question taken-for-granted linkages and to entertain seriously the possibility of de-linkage.


6 For a good discussion of Lonergan’s cognitional operations, the distinction between judgments of fact and value, and the action implications of judgments of value, see Miller, M., *The Quest for God and the Good Life: Lonergan’s Theological Anthropology* (The Catholic University of America Press: Washington, DC, 2013).

Conflicts are Natural: The Way By Which Things Progress  
JOSE L. LOPEZ

Depending on the situation, the word conflict can either be used as a noun or a verb. As a noun, conflict refers to a serious disagreement or argument which in many cases drags on for significant periods of time. Synonymous words with conflict are a fight, battle, or struggle. As a verb, conflict refers to the action of going against and being different in a way that prevents agreement. Synonymous verbs include collide, clash, and diverge. In all its forms conflict tends to have a negative connotation and is seen as a bad thing. It additionally seems to intrinsically involve people only in groups or pairs of humans when it occurs. Further, conflict is viewed as a problem to be solved and worked on to achieve a resolution.

This paper challenges the assumptions that conflict is decidedly negative, involves humanity only, and is a problem needing a solution. Science, and in particular physics, provides us with a wide-ranging perspective that allows us in some situations to move outside our own human-centric existence and consider fundamental workings of the Universe. What scientific discovery has fundamentally revealed to humanity is that everything in the universe is in many ways interconnected and there is a elementary interdependence on all matter.

In many ways, the Universe essentially thrives on conflict. Everything we see has come about due to conflict in action. From the perspective of the Cosmos, conflict, or the constant collisions and clashes of matter and energy, is what created our universe. In fact in 1927, a Belgian astrophysicist named Georges Lemaître (1894-1966), who was a Catholic priest and Jesuit, proposed that the universe is constantly evolving and surprisingly expanding. Lemaître
proposed that the universe began as an extraordinarily hot and dense primordial atom of energy\(^1\). He proposed that the beginning of time and the universe was the result of pent-up matter or energy that violently exploded outward. This initial event is now called the Big Bang. Space and time did not exist before this initial moment of conflict. Effectively, the Big Bang explosion, due to the conflicting matter and energy, created spacetime, and that spacetime in which we currently live has been expanding and changing every since. In fact, the Big Bang led to the formation of all spacetime, matter, and energy. To this very day, the constant conflict of matter colliding and energy diverging and clashing is what allows the basic existence of all life in the universe, even humans. When it comes to conflict, the universe doesn't perceive conflict as negative or for that matter positive. The Cosmos simply uses the conflict of the constantly interchanging matter and energy to grow and evolve.

From the perspective of the Cosmos, effectively the most disconcerting revelation is that conflict is a fundamental action of the universe. It does not depend on humans or is caused by humans, but it has effectively led to humankind and all known substance in the universe. One view to consider is that without cosmological conflict we would not even exist. This scientific eye-opener, aside from being a bit disconcerting, is also very humbling. It reveals that humanity is one of just many forms into which matter and energy have evolved. Of course, we also find at this point the realization that although science gives a distinct perspective and new knowledge on the universe we live in, it undoubtedly has the great limitation of not explaining why the Big Bang happened, why we have come to exist, and effectively the predictive ability to explain where we are going in the future.

With such a humbling realization, that even the almighty power of the scientific method has certain limitations, the possibility of understanding conflict itself is left as a question. One
Definite awareness is that conflict is not necessarily a problem in need of a solution. Conflict is not a problem in of itself. It is the way by which the universe has come to be. Even if one were to narrow the scope of conflict to the confines of human interactions with each other, the cosmic revelation is that effectively conflict might be some inherent necessity. Civilization has effectively evolved due to much conflict and the consequences of the conflict.

In a way, civilization with all its laws and policies has effectively attempted to stop, prevent, and mediate conflict. From our cosmic perspective, the conclusion seems to indicate that conflict is an inherent way through which nature changes and progresses into the future. The admirable attempt of Kenneth Melchin in his interesting lectures from May 20-22, 2014 at Seton Hall University provide yet another attempt by which humans seek to mediate and resolve conflict. Melchin uses the ideas of Bernard Lonergan (1904-1984), the Canadian Catholic Jesuit priest, theologian, and philosopher. Lonergan’s masterwork, *Insight: A Study of Human Understanding*, develops a method of understanding of how thinking leads to insights that eventually lead to knowledge.

Professor Melchin’s appropriation and use of the General Empirical Method (GEM), or as he refers to it, Insight Theory, to understand conflict resolution and the mediation process is a rather novel approach. The idea to use Insight Theory to help people understand each other’s thinking about how they developed their particular views provides a means by which parties in conflict can understand opposing perspectives. Insight mediators help parties through the learning processes in conflicts. Insight Mediation understands conflict resolution as learning. People in conflict learn about the concerns of others which allows them to learn about the values of others. As Melchin, emphasized the learning is transformative, and it opens pathways for cooperation and resolution.
Although Melchin provides a convincing argument for the applicability of Insight Theory, he typically views conflict in a negative manner, narrowly focusing it on human interaction, and approaches it in a way that conflict is in need of resolution. The broader implication of Lonergan's cognitive method would lead, if followed fully, to new revelatory knowledge. The first insight would be that conflict is a natural occurrence throughout the universe. It is not a limited and specific event confined to human relationships with each other or even humans directly interacting with the universe. The main insight would be that conflict is not necessarily a problem, but a method by which progress happens. This true understanding of conflict would lead to a transcendent experience where each thinker would understand the interconnectedness of not only humans to each other, but also of everything else that exists in the universe.

Conflict Resolution as an Exercise in Philosophy

MICHAEL MALONEY

The following loosely connected reflections on the phenomena of conflict seeks to engage the insight into conflict resolution as a moment of "transformational learning" by placing this idea in conversation with the role of conflict in ancient literature and philosophy.

From Homer’s epic poems the Iliad and Odyssey to Hesiod’s Theogony and Works and Days the subject of conflict and violence are not only accepted in ancient literature as a natural part of the cycle of life but also appear as productive forces of the increasing articulation and intelligibility of the developing cosmos.¹ One need only read the opening lines of the Iliad, “Rage, Sing Goddess, Achille’s rage”² to see the central place accorded to conflict and violence in the psychology of the ancients. As presented in the opening of Hesiod’s Theogony, the increasing intelligibility and articulability of the cosmos out of the unintelligibility of the abyss (Chaos) through a series of incidents of terrific family violence underscores the ambiguity of the value, or disvalue, of violence and conflict for the ancients.³

Whatever one’s final judgment on the ancients’ ultimate position with regard to conflict and violence, their blunt acceptance and curiosity about the phenomenon of conflict in these works may perhaps serve as an antidote to a modern perspective on conflict that, at times, too quickly shrinks from investigating the phenomenon of conflict for insights into the nature and development of the self, especially where this development is inextricably entwined with the self’s decision regarding the ultimate intelligibility of reality.
Our participation in conflict, no matter how small, appears to have the power to raise to a level of explicit attention to the constructed, and thus fragile, nature of the self’s identity. It also seems to have the power to raise to an explicit level of attention the perspectival nature of human knowledge, and thus, ultimately the finitude of the subject. In the attempt to resolve conflict – granting that the recourse to extreme violence, the extermination of the other, is rejected – the subject must ask questions about Being, about the nature of reality, in an attempt to find some pathway through the clash of meanings, the clash of interpretations, or images of reality, raised by the conflict.

Simply put, conflict arises, at least in part, due to human finitude: our knowledge of reality is perspectival, we do not grasp Being itself; but are forced to construct an interpretation of Being. Because we are not Being, we must ask about Being. Conflict foregrounds our perspectival, our constructed, account of reality. If this is so, conflict appears to be an opportunity for the exercise of philosophy, in the Platonic/Socratic sense: for a practice of the dialectic art which leads the subject beyond the limited appearance of reality captured in the subject’s constructed image of reality, which now finds itself called into question by the conflict. The use of the word image, “eikon” in the Greek, is intentional here. Conflict resolution can be interpreted as an act of iconoclasm, the breaking of images. We are called to turn away from our currently held view of reality, our faulty image of reality, to cast our gaze beyond this limited view and so traverse the path to a more accurate apprehension of the real. Like Socrates’s revolutionary program of education through the dialectic art, we are called to play the role of iconoclast. The role is foisted upon us by our interlocutor, by the conflict itself. It is apt, then, to
consider the moment of insight that resolves the conflict between parties as a moment of “transformational learning” and the conflict itself as a possible opportunity for pedagogy. Perhaps it is no coincidence that the Platonic dialogues make use of conflict as the engine that drives the participants toward a more adequate apprehension of reality.

There is one more point I wish to make connected with the foregoing. Conflict is uncomfortable; it is painful. In conflict the self feels itself under threat. But what is the nature of this threat, what is the object of this fear? Here it is perhaps useful to turn to the researches in depth psychology undertaken in the last half of the twentieth century that focused on elaborating the distinction between fear and anxiety, and which came to understand fear as the localization, the formation, of a deeper anxiety which is inseparable from the self’s ontological status as a finite being. Simply put, the self lives with the anxiety of not being able to preserve itself in being: the self lives under the shadow of death. This ontological anxiety can be transposed into an epistemological register: the self lives under the threat that reality is ultimately unintelligible, that the archē, the first principle of reality, is, as in Hesiod’s Theogony, the abyss, Chaos. As the theologian Paul Tillich argues, because the anxiety that is at the root of every fear is the anxiety of our annihilation, our eventual nothingness, this anxiety cannot be combated: nothingness shares no side with us, it, by definition, has no form; it is the abyss, and into the abyss one simply falls. Thus, the self must translate this anxiety into something it can combat: it must attempt to inform this anxiety, give it a form, so that the self can enter into conflict with it, perhaps even vanquish it. The self must translate this free-floating anxiety into an object of fear. Against such an object of fear one can engage in conflict, the very act of which is an affirmation of the self.
If this analysis of the need for the self to create objects of fear and engage in conflict with them as a means of self-affirmation is correct, it perhaps shines a light on why conflict cannot be eradicated from human life: conflict is an existential of the finite human being. However, it seems also to point toward the possibility of treating conflict resolution as an exercise in philosophy, as a moment of “transformational learning,” wherein one is brought into a deeper relationship with the real, with Being.

If the anxiety underlying every fear is the anxiety of nothingness, then a solution to this anxiety of non-being would be to find a resource which can shelter the finite creature from extinction: that which is impervious to non-being, that which is stable in itself, eternal. But this search for something stable amidst the radical flux of reality is an apt description of the way of life that is associated with ancient philosophy. If the Delphic oracle’s admonition “Know thyself,” is interpreted as a goad to the self to confront itself in its finitude and to seek to transcend that finitude, to take measures to seek that which is eternal and deathless as a shelter, then perhaps conflict should be seen as moment in which the possibility exists for the self to be opened to an experience of radical self-transcendence. In this case, conflict resolution could be seen as an exercise of philosophy, as the breaking of our finite images of reality, and the conflict mediator seen as a practitioner of the maieutic art of bringing the participants to a truer grasp of reality.

5 Ibid.
Conflict is a necessary part of life. For whatever the reason, some people have a negative connotation associated with the existence of conflict. However, I believe that conflict is not necessarily a bad thing and that people can learn a lot about themselves and others because of it. When resolutions to conflict occur, one is able to have more of an understanding as to how and why people behave and act, causing a person to grow and mature in many different ways. Research in science is based on having conflict because an end result cannot be obtained without constantly disputing and questioning why things happen. As a result of this curiosity and questioning, learning new things in any discipline, especially science, can cause conflict. However, it is this conflict that drives researchers to try to discover new things. Without it, scientists would most likely struggle in developing new ideas and theories to test. Therefore, conflict is required not only to become a better person, but also to continuously advance knowledge, particularly in the scientific community.

Lonergan’s philosophical Insight approach can help provide people a means of structured mediation and assisted negotiation towards conflict. It helps people realize that all knowledge gained is a change in a self-state of becoming natural with the human mind. Lonergan’s structure of cognitional operations has defined eight stages through which people progress in attempting to deal with conflict. The stages are not set and the mind can move back and forth between stages until the conflict has been resolved. The eight stages are further
separated with the first four dealing with conflict as fact and the next four dealing with conflict based on act and value. The first four stages are experiencing, understanding, verifying/judging and deciding. The next four stages are experiencing and feeling, understanding, verifying/judging and deciding. These stages are linked and delinked in certain ways to help resolve conflict. When delinking occurs, a transformative experience moving from threat to openness takes place. Once this openness happens, playful humor can help people move away from conflict and more towards a resolution. Nevertheless, even though a compromise has been reached with certainty, new conflict should arise because new knowledge should at least still try to be obtained. In order for that to happen, new thoughts and ideas should at least be heard and entertained to either help reinforce the compromise or again change the original conflict.¹

In some instances, people may need a mediator to achieve conflict resolution. The goal of the mediator is to help people enhance their curiosity and move from certainty to uncertainty. He/she is the facilitator of the conversation that people want to have and the person that helps people decide what conclusions they hope to achieve. He/she tries to attain a successful, mutual understanding of learning with all parties involved. However, a mediator is not necessarily needed, especially if the conflict in question can be solved civilly without harm, violence, or injustice. It is the playfulness and humor from the people involved with the conflict that helps in finding a resolution and moving away from conflict.

Conflict is required not only to become a better person, but also to continuously advance knowledge, particularly in the scientific community. Without always asking questions, science would not have much progress. It needs questioning and postulating of hypotheses in order to continuously gain new insights and knowledge. Who knows if society today would have any of the modern technology it currently possesses without conflict? Developing this new modern
technology has now led us into new conflict that needs resolution. However, in order to improve as a society, we must continue to develop new ideas and never stop asking why. Conflict is not only important in science, but across all disciplines. It is finding resolution and understanding that makes conflict a necessary part of life. Without it, people most likely would be very complacent and not possess the confidence necessary to wonder and question why things are in the world and/or if they can possibly change.

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The “Interiority Dialog”  
Lonergan’s Insight Theory and The Conflicted Freshman Writer

MELINDA D. PAPACCIO

I am a terrible writer. I always got low grades on my papers and I know it will be the same in college. How can I possibly pass this class? I’m going to give it my best shot but I’m worried I will fail, like I have before. How many students just like this are likely sitting in our classrooms, smiling sweetly at us as we announce a writing assignment, with their stomachs in knots, and a storm of worry raging inside? It is safe to say that most students come to a freshman composition course with some misgivings about writing. Even those who were successful writers in high school find themselves testing the waters, figuring out what is expected of a college writer. Writing is such a personal act: not only one’s command of language but also one’s command of one’s own thought process is on display and will be meticulously evaluated. An assignment can take on the quality of a direct threat to the students’ self-worth. Their past experiences of difficulty create the expectation of continued failure in the writing class and this inner conflict threatens to undermine students’ potential to benefit from their writing class experience.

While it is impractical for the instructor to mediate a conflict between students and their unseen foes, Lonergan’s Insight Theory, which involves a “method of self-understanding,” can help instructors address this issue so that students take on the role of mediator of their own conflicts. The composition class can offer students the opportunity for significant personal growth as well as academic development. Melchin asserts that “[l]earning requires more than
seeing and hearing; it requires … insights that yield understanding". According to Lonergan, insight occurs the moment we understand something as a result of our questioning. Insights cannot be forced, however. They will arise when the time and conditions are right. When Insight Theory is successfully used for conflict resolution the parties experience an understanding of the root cause and solution to a conflict after they learn about each other’s “values,” “fears,” and “cares” in relation to the issue at hand. They begin to understand what they really care about and feel threatened by. Once these cares and fears are addressed, conflicts are more easily resolved.

So, using the Insight Theory for Conflict Resolution paradigm, the instructor then must take on the role of mediator. Melchin explains that the mediator’s function is not to find the solution to the conflict but rather to create the conditions in which the parties can find the solution themselves. In helping the “parties discover and give voice to [their] values [the things they care about] some of the frustration and anxiety of conflict eases.” Can this same paradigm be used in the composition classroom? How might this be done? What might the assignment look like? Perhaps a dialog of the student with herself, what I might name an “interiority dialog” can help the student resolve her own conflicted feelings about writing so that she might begin to act as “an agent of [her] own destiny as distinct from a mere billiard ball knocked about by circumstances.” If the assignment has the desired effect the student will make what Cronin calls a “crucial breakthrough to interiority” that enables her to become more self-aware of the ways in which her experiences have affected her thinking. What follows, then, is a prototype assignment for the “interiority dialog.”
The “Interiority Dialog”

"...we do not grow towards maturity along smooth, even paths. Rather, our lives unfold in fits and starts. We experience times of calm and times of turbulence, and often the turbulence functions as a catalyst for growth. A principal feature of turbulence is conflict. We may not enjoy the experience, but we can benefit from it. We can even grow from it. We can learn new skills for dealing with conflict, new attitudes towards conflict, and new ways of facing those problems in life we might previously have avoided because of our fear of conflict."

This assignment is based on the premise that no student emerges from pre-college writing experiences unscathed. Writing skills are central to academic success, yet even the highest achieving students have experienced struggles with writing somewhere along the way. Student anxiety about their first year writing class is also fairly universal. Typically, students’ memories of past writing difficulties create the anticipation of future difficulties, hence the student may remain conflicted about the task of writing.

Here you will create a mock conflict resolution session in which you will be the mediator for a dialog between your “college self” and your “high school self.” Your college self wants to do well in your writing class, but your high school self is struggling with fear about past experiences. Your college self is struggling to cope with writing assignments in the face of your high school self’s expectation of future failure based on past struggles. Thus the college self is prevented from achieving its full academic potential. As the mediator in this conflict, your job is to help the two selves to get to the bottom of this and to expose the things each self fears, or feels
threatened by, as well as what each side cares about and values. As mediator you will have to pose questions that help to create the conditions for an insight about the issue and how to resolve it.

**Parts of the Assignment:**

1. Mediator’s opening statement which introduces the issue at hand and articulates the reason and purpose for the conflict resolution session. (1 paragraph)

2. Parties opening statements which discuss their cares and fears regarding writing. (1 paragraph each)

3. Joint Discussion: Mediator poses questions to the parties to get them to explain and explore such things as their writing experiences, what they value, and what they feel threatened by. (three to four pages of back and forth dialog)

4. Closure: the parties, with the help of the mediator’s observations, gain insight into the solution to the problem. Conclude by making a statement about what you have learned about yourself through this mock-conflict resolution exercise. (1 paragraph)

**Questions that the Mediator can pose:**

1. What is the problem, in your view?
2. How (did/does) this make you feel?
3. What do you think will make your writing experience better?
4. What do you fear will happen if your writing conflict is not resolved?
5. What is the greatest threat to your success in writing class?
6. Why do you care about writing well?
7. What are your expectations for this session?

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2 Ibid, p. 57.
3 Ibid, p. 84-85.
4 Ibid, p. 87
5 Ibid, p. 87
8 Melchin, pp. 16-17.
Inverse Insight, a Simple Prayer, and *Something’s Gotta Give*¹

GLORIA J. THURMOND

As a singer, I often experience insight within life’s journeys through the lyrics of a song. The seminar theme of “Transforming Conflict through Insight” brought to my mind the lyrics of the 1954 popular song *Something’s Gotta Give* by songwriter, lyricist and singer Johnny Mercer, which was made popular by singer Frank Sinatra. The opening lyrics to the song are: “When an irresistible force such as you meets an old immovable object such as me, something’s gotta give.”²

In their book *Transforming Conflict through Insight*, Melchin and Picard describe Lonergan’s philosophy of insight as a “method of self-understanding.”³ Further, “[I]t is a ‘reflective practice’ in that it presupposes that we first learn how to do things in life and then only later do we get around to analyzing what we are doing.”⁴

According to Melchin and Picard, the experience of conflict requires that “we give ourselves over to genuine wonder, interest, curiosity, and questioning”⁵ in order to receive insights that will lead to transformative learning. “Insight is deeply experiential, and can only occur when the experiences begin to wash over us.”⁶

Inverse insight occurs when we realize that “we are not getting answers to questions because we are asking the wrong questions. This discovery marks the transition to entirely new ways of questioning. It inspires new ways of asking questions that lead to change.”⁷
Lonergan’s theory of inverse insight initiates a method of questioning that functions “to make sense of some experience or understand another person. This often involves demonstrating curiosity about what is valued by the other and probing what lies behind our own feelings of threat.” The cultivation of an understanding and an appreciation of the experience and perspective of the other will result in a transformative learning, according to Melchin and Picard. Inverse insight creates an opportunity for openness to a more dynamic process toward compromise, reconciliation, and transformation.

The Simple Prayer, attributed to St. Francis of Assisi and that rises from the essential empathy and compassion that define Franciscan spirituality, reflects the experience of inverse insight through an implied line of questioning that is indicative of one’s turning away from one’s own “position of certainty” to a focus on actions that will lead to reconciliation with the other.

A Simple Prayer

O Lord, make of me an instrument of Thy peace;
Where there is hatred let me bring love,
Where there is resentment let me bring forgiveness,
Where there is discord let me bring unity,
Where there is doubt let me bring faith,
Where there is error let me bring truth,
Where there is despair let me bring happiness,
Where there is sadness let me bring joy,
Where there is darkness let me bring light.
O Master, grant that I may desire rather:
To console than to be consoled,
To understand rather than to be understood,
To love rather than to be loved.
Because it is in giving that we receive;
In forgiving that we obtain forgiveness;
In dying that we rise to eternal life.

The question that is implied in the opening petition which is to be made an instrument of peace could be the following: Where is there common ground in this conflict? Or, where can we find agreement in this situation?

The desire to be made an instrument of peace is indicative of one’s willingness to let go of one’s own certainty in order to explore another’s point of view, to seek common ground in the conflict, to allow oneself to identify with the other, and to be open to the transformative learning that will lead to reconciliation and unity of purpose.

In order to effect a transition from hatred to love, one might ask the following: What value can I find in the position held by the other? Moving from resentment (or injury in some translations) to forgiveness (or pardon) may begin with one’s asking: What are the factors that have led and contributed to the situation of the other?

Other questions implied by the Simple Prayer which reflect the transitional learning activity of Lonergan’s inverse insight theory might be the following:

- What is there present in this situation that possibly unites us?
- How do I demonstrate respect for the individuality of the other?
- How can I cooperate so that the process of mediation remains dynamic?
• What can I do to foster trust and reconciliation?

Melchin and Picard make the observation that:

"what inverse insights do is de-link us from an attachment to questions and expectations that have been defined by prior insights and influenced by negative experiences from the past, which provide a framework for interpreting others. Once freed, we can become curious about other aspects of the problem that previously we had ignored or screened out. Our new-found questions and expectations can lead to new insights into the cares and concerns of others. The key to shifting is the inverse insight,"

or becoming aware of the questions that do not lead to answers.

The strong assertion made by Melchin and Picard that “genuine wonder, interest, and curiosity” are necessary for transformative learning, bears repeating. To this, I also would add that when empathy and compassion is the ultimate goal of transformative learning, one’s desire for truth will be stronger than one’s desire to be right.

The truth of Lonergan’s theory of inverse insight, and the spirit of St. Francis’ Simple Prayer are reflected in the worldly wisdom of Johnny Mercer’s song in its closing phrase: “Fight it with all of our might; chances are some heavenly star-spangled night, we’ll find out just as sure as we live, something’s gotta give.”

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1 Mercer, J., Something’s Gotta Give, 1954 song lyrics
2 Ibid.
3 Melchin, K. and Picard, C., Transforming Conflict through Insight, (University of Toronto Press: Toronto, 2008), p. 51
4 Ibid., p. 51
5 Ibid., p. 22
6 Ibid., p. 22
7 Ibid., p. 63
8 Ibid., p. 23
9 www.franciscan-archive.org
10 Melchin, K. and Picard, C., op cit., p. 66 - 67
11 Ibid., p. 22
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