

John H. Young
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Conscience Centered System

Hyde School (hyde.edu) has gained a national reputation for character development. By drawing on the Lonerganian formulation of ethics, the following paper shows how the notion of a well formed conscience flows naturally from Hyde's philosophy and its experiential character development program. This paper draws not only on the insights presented in *Insight* and *Method in Theology* by Lonergan himself, but also on some of those who have further developed his approach to ethics.¹ The argument presented here has been expressed in terms readily understandable at Hyde. Thus, it assumes no prior knowledge of Lonergan whatsoever, thereby showing how the Lonerganian approach to ethics can be communicated to a very broad audience.

The purpose of this paper is to complete a piece of unfinished business: sketching out the implementation of a conscience centered system. This concept was initially proposed by Paul Hurd and myself several years ago. The objective is to develop a *systematic* way of leading students to act out of conscience, as opposed to their doing that in a merely *incidental* manner. I initially believed that a conscience centered system is already largely implicit in Hyde's experiential character development program. So one might think that implementing such a system would be a rather straightforward matter of making explicit what is already largely implicit. While the implementation of bits and pieces of such a system were clear, an overall plan remained stubbornly obscure. Why? For one thing, I now realize that, while Hyde's experiential program provides an excellent foundation for a conscience centered system, attaining such a system requires going well beyond the experiential program. Moreover, one has to grasp how the limited range of experiences within the confines of Hyde's program can be seen as leading to the habitual disposition to act out of a *well formed conscience* independently of Hyde. And that required a deeper understanding of conscience than I possessed until rather recently. A *well formed conscience* – in essence, a conscience formed by the *truth* – is the key to a genuine conscience centered system. The full meaning of the term *well formed conscience* will become apparent in due course.

As that meaning becomes clear, it will also become apparent that the development of a well formed conscience is truly a daunting task. In fact, it is such a daunting task that I think it most unlikely that many, if any, students could attain this goal while at Hyde. Thus, one might ask what would be the point of a conscience centered system if students are unlikely to be able to attain the goal of such a system while at Hyde. *A central question to be raised here is whether students could develop a sufficient grasp of that goal, and make sufficient progress toward attaining that goal, that it would serve as an effective guide for their ongoing growth after leaving Hyde.* This is a question that those at Hyde must ultimately answer, not me. My objective here is merely to sketch out what would be entailed in implementing a genuine conscience centered system. In particular, I will attempt to show how a conscience centered system would follow naturally from

Hyde's experiential character development program. Those at Hyde can then decide for themselves whether implementing such a system would be both feasible and desirable.

Sketching out the implementation of a conscience centered system also makes apparent that there are some problematic elements within the existing articulation of Hyde's philosophy -- at least, the articulation of that philosophy which existed while I was involved with Hyde. For one thing, Hyde has grafted onto its experiential program some highly individualistic concepts and rhetoric associated with unique potential: concepts and rhetoric that are not conducive to the development of a genuine conscience centered system. I should note that the problematic elements concern the relationship of unique potential to character and conscience, not unique potential itself. I say "grafted onto" because these concepts and rhetoric do not emerge naturally from the experiential program itself. This lack of full alignment between what Hyde says and what it does creates a deep ambivalence. I sensed this ambivalence years ago. Yet the existence and significance of this ambivalence only becomes clear when viewed from the perspective of a well formed conscience.

There is a related ambivalence within the larger culture: an ambivalence that fosters attitudes and values antithetical to Hyde's own values. Yet these attitudes cannot be effectively exposed and challenged without first resolving Hyde's own ambivalence. These attitudes can be deeply embedded. Since people are likely to bring these deeply embedded attitudes with them to Hyde, and since they are not effectively exposed and challenged at Hyde, they tend to simply coexist alongside values that are left implicit within Hyde's program, despite these attitudes being antithetical to Hyde's own values. This coexistence requires explanation. Hopefully, however, it should already be apparent that, if this alleged coexistence is indeed real, a genuine conscience centered system cannot emerge until a way is found to expose and effectively challenge these attitudes.

The solution to these problems, I would suggest, is to critically reexamine Hyde's experiential program and to make fully explicit the core values and beliefs embodied therein. That is the task of Section I. Once that has been done, both the limitations of the experiential program and the steps needed to go beyond it -- steps related to the development of intellectual character -- become much clearer. Put another way, the *essential continuity* between the approach now used to develop moral character and the approach needed to develop intellectual character becomes apparent. Section II therefore proposes that if one further develops the reflection dimension of the action-reflection cycle, a conscience centered system will naturally emerge. Section III then shows that, once the notion of a well formed conscience becomes clear, the ambivalence within the Hyde program and the corresponding ambivalence in the larger culture become readily apparent. It then becomes a relatively straightforward matter to resolve that ambivalence, as shown in Section IV.

Since I have been out of touch with what is going on at Hyde for a number of years now, writing this paper may be an irrelevant exercise. Moreover, one may disagree with my analysis. Even if one largely agrees with my analysis, one may conclude that implementing a genuine conscience centered system would be either so difficult or so controversial, or both, that it should not be attempted. Nonetheless, it is instructive to

understand how a genuine conscience centered system follows naturally from Hyde's experiential program. So I will proceed.

I. Making Explicit What Is Already Implicit.

A. Choosing and choosing well. Through its experiential program, Hyde offers its students the opportunity to choose well. To the extent that students accept this opportunity, the following question therefore arises. To what extent can we get students to reflect on the experience of choosing well and ask themselves: What exactly is it that I do when I choose well? That is, can we get them to "test the process": in this case, to test their own emotional and mental processes of choosing well? If they can discover within themselves what it is that leads them to choose well, they will not only have the experience of choosing well within the confines of the Hyde program. They will also be able to take ownership of the inherent orientation within themselves that leads them to choose well. That is, they will have discovered what it means to act out of a *well formed conscience* independently of the Hyde program. It is in this sense that a further development of the reflection dimension of the action-reflection cycle would lead naturally to a conscience centered system.

Let me begin by simply asking the reader to reflect on what he or she does when making choices, irrespective of whether one chooses well or not. The choices can be trivial, like deciding what to wear in the morning, the quickest way to accomplish a set of tasks, or the fastest way to get from point A to point B. Choices like these we make repeatedly throughout each day, and we usually pay little attention to how we make them. Yet if we do pay attention to our mental dialogues in making such decisions, we find ourselves surveying a set of options and choosing among them, even if the whole process only takes a moment. On the other hand, the choices can be major life decisions, like choosing a career path, choosing a marriage partner, or selecting among treatment options for dealing with a serious illness. In such cases, we are likely to put more energy into seeing what options are available to us and to carefully assessing those options. In either case, the decision process entails coming up with a set of options and selecting among them.

Of course, choices are never made in a vacuum. Just as a physical horizon defines the limit of how far we can see, we each have a mental horizon that defines the limit of our cares and concerns and of our understanding of the world in which we live. And it is within this horizon that we make all our choices. Things that lie beyond our mental horizon don't enter into our decision process when making choices. Thus, options that might in principle be available to us never appear on our mental radar if they lie beyond our mental horizon. So if our horizons are very limited, and, especially, if our cares and concerns have become distorted in some sense, we are likely to consistently make poor choices.

The notion of horizon is helpful in thinking about Hyde's experiential program. The objective of developing one's character is probably not a major concern for most of Hyde's entering students. Hyde expands their horizons, not by lecturing them, but by

engaging them in a range of challenging activities, providing them with a supportive environment for confronting these challenges and urging them to put forth their best effort. The value of these approaches may initially lie well beyond their own horizons. But successfully confronting these challenges, and doing so within a supportive community, offers students a very positive experience. So it is something that they begin to care about, and to care deeply about. Thus their horizons begin to expand. And as they progress from motions to effort to excellence, their horizons continue to expand, and the development of their character does indeed become a major concern.

Now let us ask by what criterion people select among the options available to them. Whatever the range of options, do we not select the option that in some sense appears most worthwhile to us? Thus, when someone wants to do something -- anything whatsoever -- that something must in some sense appear worthwhile to the person. What is often not so obvious is whether what *appears* worthwhile is *truly* worthwhile. That is, does a course of action appear worthwhile merely because it appears to be subjectively agreeable or to be avoiding something that is disagreeable? Distinguishing between the genuinely worthwhile and the only apparently worthwhile, therefore, requires further reflection. Now this distinction between what is only *apparently* worthwhile and what is *genuinely* worthwhile is of enormous significance. For is not choosing what is genuinely worthwhile the essence of *choosing well*? And is not this criterion for choosing well completely general? Does it not apply to *all* the choices we make in life? Moreover, is it not very simple, at least to express, even if not to implement?

Yet are things really as simple as just suggested? In our very pluralistic society, people strongly disagree about many things. So many will ask: Who gets to decide what is *truly worthwhile*? Implicit in this question is the assumption that, at least in some areas, there is no such thing as the *truly worthwhile*. Does not the obvious fact that many people have deeply held convictions that are at odds with the deeply held convictions of many other people imply that at least some values must be inherently subjective?

Of course, there are areas where we all make the distinction between the *apparently* and the *truly* worthwhile. Small children may wish to play in the street or to eat unlimited amounts of candy, but their parents don't see such activities as being truly worthwhile. Hyde's experiential program also brings this distinction home to students in a very tangible way, even when it is not explicitly articulated. In confronting the various challenges in Hyde's program, students experience very directly that many things they would not have thought to be at all worthwhile are in fact eminently so. Conversely, some of the things that once appeared eminently worthwhile no longer do so. Thus, among the cares and concerns that define their horizons, some are dropped, some are added and others are modified.

So life experiences can lead people to change their minds about what they judge to be *truly worthwhile*. Yet the above examples hardly resolve the issue concerning the existence of whether there exists values that are *truly worthwhile* in all areas, especially in highly controversial areas. Thus, we come back to the question: Who gets to decide what is *truly worthwhile*? In a conscience centered system, the answer is that each

individual decides for himself or herself. However, their judgment is trustworthy *only* if one has already developed a *well formed conscience*. As to whether that is indeed the right criterion for judging the trustworthiness of one's decisions, the answer to that is: *Test the process and decide for yourself*. So, tentatively accepting that formulation as a guiding principle, let us see where it leads.

If we ask students to consider what it is that they do when they choose well, what is the basis for their response? Of course, we are not asking them to test the Hyde process in the abstract. Rather, we are asking them to test that process by first going through it: from motions to effort to excellence. But once they have made significant progress in experientially testing this process, we are also asking them to step back from time to time and ask themselves if this process itself is truly worthwhile. So what is the basis for their response? What exactly do they find themselves doing when they choose well?

Now one might ask at this point: How much choosing do Hyde students actually do? The range of options that Hyde presents to students is very limited: namely, whether or not to put forth their best effort in Hyde assigned activities. In adult life one is confronted with a far broader range of options than whether or not to put forth one's best effort in a pre-assigned activity. One must first decide whether the activity itself is truly worthwhile and thereby worthy of putting forth one's best effort. In presenting students with Hyde assigned activities, that decision has already been made for the students. In adult life, one must also decide how to order one's priorities and integrate one's diverse activities, roles and responsibilities in a meaningful way. At Hyde, that decision has also already been made. Hyde controls the schedule. Thus, in adult life choosing well entails far more than simply deciding whether or not to put forth one's best effort in pre-assigned activities.

B. Role of moral character. Yet the decision of whether or not to put forth one's best effort in Hyde assigned activities is indeed a genuine decision. And it is only the individual student who can make that decision. So what is the basis for deciding whether or not he or she is choosing well? First, students experience a significant change within themselves. Recall that moral character is the habitual willingness to do whatever one judges to be genuinely worthwhile. As already noted, students' horizons change as they go from motions to effort to excellence. Thus, the change they experience within themselves is the gradual development of this habitual willingness. Yet achieving this change is a struggle. The reason is that they must overcome their own inherent willfulness, which is the tendency to do whatever one wants, whether it is genuinely worthwhile or not. And that's not easy. It often entails changing habitual attitudes and behavior patterns, habits that can be deeply embedded. Moreover, confronting challenges requires a willingness to let go of control, to take risks and to expose one's vulnerabilities. And it's not easy to do that on a consistent basis over an extended period of time until that willingness becomes habitual.

However, as this willingness begins to develop, students experience it as something very positive. They find themselves becoming the persons they truly want to become. And as their judgment of the value of developing their moral character becomes more definite,

they also begin to experience the need to act in a manner consistent with that judgment. That is, they begin to act out of conscience. *It is precisely the demand for alignment between one's judgments of what is truly worthwhile and one's actions that gives conscience its force. Integrity demands that the person who judges and the person who acts be one and the same. Our thinking and our doing must be in alignment.* As a consequence of experiencing the force of conscience, students begin to take responsibility for the development of their own moral character. So we can already begin to see how a conscience centered system is, at least to some extent, already implicit within Hyde's experiential character development program.

Of course, that is not the whole story. Let us return to the question of asking students what it is that they do when choosing well. Students might choose well within the Hyde program. They might even act out of conscience, as just described in the preceding paragraph. However, it is quite another thing for them to accurately grasp their own mental and emotional processes when choosing well and critically "test these processes."

Moreover, during the process of character development, students are very much a work in progress. They are often ambivalent about the superior value of developing this habitual willingness. They feel the pull of clinging to old patterns of willful attitudes and behavior. And while willingness is in the process of developing, it is decidedly less than habitual. So students often fall short. Given that situation, one might ask whether they are really capable of saying precisely what it is that they do when they choose well. On the other hand, there is one very important aspect of the process of choosing well that is relatively easy to grasp.

C. Role of feelings. Let us consider the various motivations that prompt students to put forth some level of effort as they progress through the Hyde program. For some, the initial motivation may be simply to avoid disciplinary action. For others, they may simply be doing what they are told. They fear confronting authority. Or, they may just do whatever everyone else is doing. They don't want to stand out. Many will find that they actually enjoy the activities in which they are told to participate. And they find that putting forth a group effort is fun. Some may also be especially talented in certain activities and wish to be seen performing well: i.e., they want to show off and win approval. Or, even if they are not especially talented, since striving for one's personal best is what is emphasized at Hyde, that is what they want to be seen doing.

With a little practice, students should be quite capable of recognizing such feelings and motivations. Initially, they may often be reluctant to share these feelings and motivations with others. But journaling offers a good mechanism for them to reflect upon and express these feelings and motivations.

What all of the feelings and motivations just discussed have in common is that students are merely doing what is agreeable or avoiding what is disagreeable. To be sure, they perceive what they are doing as in some sense worthwhile, or, at least, more worthwhile than the alternatives available to them. But are they choosing what only *appears* worthwhile? Or are they choosing what they judge to be *truly* worthwhile? When they

fail to get beyond considerations of their own personal satisfaction, their chosen course of action may or may not be truly worthwhile. Thus, the various criteria discussed above pertain to what is only *apparently* worthwhile. To be sure, in engaging in these Hyde-assigned activities, they are doing something that is truly worthwhile: developing their character. But that is not yet their motivation – at least not their primary motivation – for engaging in these activities. This is not a criticism. Part of the genius of the Hyde process is to engage students in truly worthwhile activities, despite the inadequacies of their own motivations. Their ongoing engagement will hopefully lead them to a gradual awakening of the value of developing their character through putting forth their best effort in these activities.

So how do their feelings and motivations change as this awakening progresses? As the value of developing their character becomes more apparent to them, they increasingly desire to put forth their best effort in these activities, *irrespective* of whether that effort is agreeable or disagreeable. Some days it might feel great, and other days it might feel anything but great. However, that becomes increasingly irrelevant. Students become increasingly willing to let go of what merely feels good. Rather, they become motivated to put forth their best effort simply because they judge that level of effort to be *truly worthwhile*. And once they judge that level of effort to be *truly worthwhile*, putting forth that level of effort is what conscience demands. Of course, students might still act out of mixed motives for a considerable period of time. The key point, however, is that the desire to do what is truly worthwhile *eventually* takes them *beyond* acting on the basis of what is merely agreeable or disagreeable. *This change in motivation is critically important.*

Thus, there is an essential aspect of the process of choosing well where students are indeed capable of saying precisely what it is that goes on when they choose well. They are able to trace their own movement from acting on the basis of merely self regarding feelings to going beyond those feelings to desiring what is truly worthwhile. This is a critical distinction. The distinction between *self regarding feelings* and *self transcending feelings* corresponds to the distinction between *willfulness* and *willingness*. In letting go of self regarding feelings, students are not forgoing self fulfillment. Quite to the contrary. They tend to find that making this step is enormously fulfilling. But that is for them to discover. That is the key criterion of testing the process. So it is important for students to critically test this point. Do I really put forth my best effort because I value the development of my character? How does that differ from my earlier motivations for engaging in Hyde assigned activities? Do I understand on the basis of my own experience the difference between willfulness and willingness? Which do I ultimately find more satisfying? Why? How is this distinction related to choosing well? It will take time for students to resolve these issues in their own minds, which point merits further discussion.

As students repeatedly strive for excellence, they develop the *habits* that constitute moral character. The *habitual willingness* of moral character is an *emotional disposition*. Now emotions are spontaneous responses to situations we encounter. When events contribute in a positive way to people and things we care about, we are happy. When events

diminish in some way the people and things we care about, we are saddened. When events appear to threaten us in some way, we become anxious – etc., etc. That is, spontaneous emotional responses are produced by events being filtered and interpreted through our cares and concerns: i.e., through our horizon.

As the preceding discussion hopefully makes clear, students' horizons change as their moral character develops. Consequently, their emotional responses to events are also changing. They are developing new *habits of the heart*. It is from these new habits of the heart that new patterns of behavior also tend to spontaneously follow. *Thus, the essence of moral character development is the fostering of self transcending feelings*. Now, as already noted, students (as well as adults) might experience mixed motives for a long period of time, perhaps a very long period of time. The key to moral character development, therefore, is to reinforce the self transcending feelings while disregarding the feelings oriented toward self satisfaction. And this is precisely what students do when they choose to put forth their best effort, at least, when they put forth their best effort for the right reasons. *Feelings*, which are *spontaneous*, can only be modified *over the long term*. *Best effort*, on the other hand, is a *choice* that determines our behavior *in the here and now*. Or, put succinctly, *fake it till you make it*.

As students' moral character becomes ever more fully developed, their spontaneous, emotional responses draw them ever more strongly to doing what is genuinely worthwhile: to going beyond their self centered concerns, beyond what is *merely* agreeable or disagreeable. Doing what is genuinely worthwhile eventually becomes *second nature*.

Of course, this is not the whole story of choosing well. So far, we have considered the development of moral character only within the framework of Hyde's program. Hyde has made most of the judgments as to what is truly worthwhile. However, acting out of a well formed conscience in adult life entails far more than putting forth one's best effort in pre-assigned activities. So we need to ask what else is entailed? In particular, we need to grasp the role that *best effort* and *self transcending feelings* play in choosing well *independently* of Hyde. As will soon become apparent, these two factors are the *key link* between the experiential program and the development of intellectual character.

II. Going beyond Hyde's experiential program.

A. Role of intellectual character. The role of intellectual character has not been as well developed at Hyde as that of moral character (at least, that was the case while I was involved with Hyde). Thus, to attain a genuine conscience centered system, we need to go beyond making explicit what is already implicit in Hyde's experiential program. Let me begin by asking what is required to choose well independently of the Hyde program. Consider the following two elements of making good choices.

First, we can't make good choices without basing them on a knowledge of reality, as opposed to fantasy and wishful thinking. In particular, we need knowledge of human reality: what makes us humans tick. Good intentions are necessary, but not sufficient.

We must understand the situation that confronts us. And we must understand the likely consequences of possible courses of action. Second, we must engage in a process of deliberation. It is not always obvious what is the truly worthwhile thing to do. So we must sift through the possibilities in pursuit of that which is *truly* of value.

Both of the above two elements clearly depend on the development of intellectual character: the habitual willingness to pursue the truth wherever it leads. Taken together, these two elements will also allow us to grasp the meaning of the term *well formed conscience* – i.e., a conscience formed by the *truth*. With the development of a well formed conscience, we also become aware of ourselves as *moral beings*. We recognize that we not only choose among possible courses of action in life; we also determine the sort of person we are to become through these choices. Let us begin by discussing the two elements that depend on the development of intellectual character.

1. Process of inquiry. Knowledge of reality is acquired through a process of inquiry. We experience things that cause us to wonder and ask questions. And we seek answers to those questions. Then, at least if we are thinking critically, we ask if our answers are really correct.

For example, consider “testing the Hyde process.” Hyde’s experiential program has a deep impact on students. So they can’t help wondering what is going on within themselves. As they eventually notice that their cares and concerns are starting to change, they start to make sense of their experiences. They begin to gain insight into the meaning and significance of their experiences. This shift in their horizon also prompts further questions. Why is it shifting? Where is all this headed? What are these changes telling me about myself? Are these changes for real? With regard to these questions, we note that as well as understanding, there can also be misunderstanding. So students must continue to “test the process.” They need to check their understanding against the understanding of their peers and against their own further experience. Have I correctly grasped the meaning of these experiences?

As this example illustrates, the process of inquiry is both spontaneous and dynamic. Wonder arises spontaneously. Consider the example of small children. Without being taught to do so, they are always asking questions. Unfortunately, by the time students get to high school, that spontaneity has often been tamped down and needs to be rekindled. The process of inquiry is also dynamic. One thing leads to another, although not always in a neat, orderly progression. Wonder leads to questions, and questions seek answers. In asking questions, we anticipate answers before we get them. Thus, the process of inquiry is inherently oriented toward a goal: namely, the truth. That goal spontaneously prompts a still further question: Is it really so? Answers therefore need to be checked. Finally, one comes to a conclusion: Yes, it really is so, or, no, it is not so. Or maybe, the evidence is still inconclusive. Whatever the conclusion, answers are always responses to limited questions. So there is always more to understand. Thus, our ongoing experiences and curiosity motivate us to repeat this process of inquiry over and over again in an effort to attain knowledge of reality. The spontaneity of this process implies that we are

inherently oriented toward the truth. This orientation is an integral part of our very *identity*.

Although we all spontaneously engage in this process of inquiry, most people would not find it an easy task to articulate this dynamic mental process. For one thing, when we are thinking, we are thinking about something, not the process of thinking itself. The focus of our attention is on *what* we are trying to understand, not on the mental processes *by which* we come to understand. Yet we perform these mental operations spontaneously, even though we may not be able to articulate clearly what we are doing and how the various operations relate to one another in the overall process of attaining knowledge. Also, because it is so natural to focus our attention on *what* we are trying to understand, it is not especially easy to extend our attention to the mental processes *by which* we come to understand.

a. Self discovery. In that regard, it is worth noting that “testing the Hyde process” can be an exercise in self discovery in two distinct, but interrelated, senses. First, there is *what* the students are discovering about themselves through the Hyde process. In becoming aware of how their horizons are shifting and how their moral character is developing through the experiential program, students are gaining knowledge of who they are as a person. Moreover, they are experiencing this self discovery as part of a group. It is an interactive process. They discover that we are inherently social beings. Second, there is the process *by which* they discover this knowledge: having experiences, making sense of these experiences, and critically testing their understanding. The process *by which* they discover knowledge of themselves is also telling them something very important about their identity. Namely, they are *inherent learners*. They are inherently oriented toward the truth, although this orientation is often obscured, as discussed below.

It is also worth noting that academics can extend this process of self discovery in the same two distinct, but interrelated, senses. First, in academics, students gain knowledge of the physical and social worlds of which they are a part. In this sense, academics can also be viewed as an expanded exercise in *self discovery*. This knowledge of the physical and social worlds is *what* the students discover in the content of their courses. Second, if students are taught, not by rote learning, but rather by teaching them *strategies* of learning -- e.g., collecting data and organizing facts, creative problem solving, and critical thinking -- then they also learn the process *by which* they discover knowledge of reality. They discover that they are *inherent learners*, and the process by which they learn about the external world is fundamentally similar to the process by which they learn about themselves.

b. Beings in tension. While we are all inherent learners, that is obviously not the whole story. We all know that errors and misconceptions abound: errors and misconceptions on all sorts of topics. We also know that many people hold onto these errors and misconceptions quite tenaciously. If we are all inherent learners, how can that be? As well as a desire to know the truth, we humans are also motivated by all sorts of fears and desires. And these fears and desires can get in the way of pursuing the process of inquiry to its proper conclusion. We can let ourselves be blinded by biases and overly influenced

by conventional wisdom. Or, we might be in the grip of an ideology of one sort or another that leads us to come to conclusions in conformity with our preexisting beliefs, whether those beliefs are valid or not. We might just be extremely opinionated and cling to beliefs to which we are attached. Also, when the truth can be emotionally painful, we might simply try to block it out. And we can also just be intellectually lazy. As a consequence, these subjective fears and desires -- i.e., the self regarding feelings -- frequently win out over the desire to know the truth. When that happens, the process of inquiry is short circuited or derailed. That is, it stops short of raising and resolving all the relevant questions. As a consequence, many simply believe what they willfully choose to believe, whether it is really true or not.

So it is that, despite our inherent orientation toward the truth, errors and misconceptions abound. Thus, as students test their own mental and emotional processes when they engage in inquiry, they also need to become aware of the diverse tendencies within themselves and others by which the process of inquiry can be derailed. That is, as part of their self discovery, they need to come to the recognition that we humans are *beings in tension*. On the one hand, we are spontaneously oriented toward seeking the truth; on the other hand, we are subject to a variety of subjective desires and aversions that can prevent us from attaining the truth.

This tension is precisely why it is so important to develop intellectual character. We need to develop new habits of the heart so that we become *emotionally disposed* toward pursuing the truth wherever it leads. This means more than simply correcting a particular error or misconception. Rather, it means a more radical transformation of our horizon: grasping that our orientation toward the truth is an *inherent* part of our very *identity*, and that being true to that identity *demand*s that we pursue the truth wherever it leads. Being true to that identity therefore implies the need to develop a *habitual* disposition to dispel *all* illusion and pretense from our lives. This is a radical transformation indeed. And it poses an enormous challenge. It requires a strong sense of curiosity and a habitual willingness to ask tough questions. We might need to seriously question cherished and long held beliefs. We also need to be imaginative and persistent in seeking answers to these questions. And we need to be critical with regard to the answers we attain. Are those answers really supported by the evidence or not? Note that the process of inquiry itself is primarily intellectual, not emotional. Yet the *habitual disposition* to pursue the process of inquiry to its natural conclusion -- the *habitual willingness* to follow the truth wherever it leads -- is *emotional*. It is precisely this *habitual willingness* that constitutes intellectual character.

c. Self transcending feelings. The pursuit of truth takes us beyond ourselves to what is really so. Correspondingly, it is *self transcending feelings* that dispose us to pursue the truth. Just as in the case of moral character development, we develop our intellectual character by reinforcing these self transcending feelings and ignoring our self regarding feelings. And that is exactly what we do when we choose to put forth our *best effort* in the pursuit of the truth. That means we pay attention to the facts, whether they are what we want them to be or not; we are curious about things we don't understand; we doggedly pursue answers to questions that are raised, etc. Then as students' intellectual

character develops, what increasingly matters to them is not what they would like to believe, or what they have long believed, or what everyone around them believes, but *what is really so*.

Hopefully, it is now apparent how *best effort* and *self transcending feelings* are the common denominator of *both* Hyde's experiential program *and* the development of intellectual character. In that sense, the development of intellectual character follows naturally from the experiential program and builds upon it as a foundation.

Now if students are to truly internalize that an orientation toward the truth is an integral part of their very *identity*, they must be challenged to "test the process": both the process of inquiry and the process of developing their intellectual character. Is the way I grasp the truth really as described above for the process of inquiry? Is it really so that the process of inquiry is easily derailed because of my own biases and subjective fears and desires? Is the process of developing my intellectual character fundamentally similar to the process of developing my moral character in the experiential program? Is developing my intellectual character an essential part of realizing my true identity?

d. Conscience. Note also that as students become ever more aware of truth as something that is genuinely worthwhile, their conscience begins to act as a force compelling them to pursue the truth. *They grasp that the development of their intellectual character is essential to the realization of their potential as a human person.* Then, as is also the case in the development of moral character, it should eventually be the individual student, not the school, who assumes primary responsibility for the ongoing development of his or her intellectual character.

e. Brother's keeper. Of course, one might ask at this point: How likely is it that students will attain this level of intellectual character development while at Hyde? In fact, a prior question might be: How likely is it that the Hyde faculty will attain this level of intellectual character development? The faculty are hardly immune from biases. Nor are they immune from the influence of conventional wisdom and ideologies of various kinds. They can be opinionated. They can also confront situations where the truth would be emotionally painful. And they can even at times be intellectually lazy. Moreover, the development of intellectual character has not traditionally played a large role at Hyde. Yet if the faculty fail to attain a high level of intellectual character development, they can hardly serve as models for their students. Nor can they serve as effective coaches for their students: helping them to get back on track when they deviate from the process of inquiry, and keeping them focused on a desire for truth and objectivity.

These concerns raise the issue of brother's keeper. As has long been the practice at Hyde, both students and faculty can challenge one another to put forth their best effort: whether it is students in the experiential program, or the faculty in exercising their roles and responsibilities as faculty. Similarly, both students and faculty could challenge one another to put forth their best effort in the pursuit of the truth. New intellectual habits are just as slow to develop as other kinds of habits. So we need to make a deliberate effort over an extended period of time to develop them. Reminders from our peers can

therefore be an essential prod to keep us moving in the right direction. And even when we try to put forth our best effort, others can often spot bias and preconceived notions in our perspective more effectively than we can do ourselves. Thus, brother's keeper can also serve as an essential prod in getting us to reexamine our assumptions. Moreover, our horizons are always limited. So others can also recognize relevant questions that we have failed to ask, or promising leads that we have failed to follow through on. Clearly, therefore, brother's keeper should play an essential role in keeping the process of inquiry on track until all the relevant questions have been raised and resolved.

And, I might add, if the practice of brother's keeper among the faculty cannot be effectively extended to the pursuit of the truth and the development of intellectual character, I see little hope for successfully implementing a genuine conscience centered system at Hyde.

f. Feasibility. Obviously, our knowledge of reality will always be limited. But if it is possible to bring students to the point of accepting primary responsibility for the development of their intellectual character, they will also be able to recognize the significance of basing their choices on a knowledge of reality, not fantasy and wishful thinking. Clearly, therefore, this is a key requirement for choosing well.

Still, the question remains as to whether it is really possible to bring students to such a high level of intellectual character development while they are at Hyde. If not, then we must confront the same question for intellectual character development that was raised at the outset of this essay with regard to the development of a well formed conscience. That question is: *Can Hyde students develop a sufficient grasp of this goal, and make sufficient progress toward attaining this goal, that it would serve as an effective guide for their ongoing growth after leaving Hyde?* Without yet trying to answer that question, let us go on to consider a further -- and still more challenging -- requirement for choosing well.

2. Process of deliberation. Knowledge of reality pertains to facts: i.e., to what is. Values pertain to what should be. The process of inquiry is concerned with ascertaining what is. The process of deliberation is concerned with ascertaining what should be. Carrying out the process of deliberation in a thoroughly objective manner and then acting upon that judgment is, therefore, the very essence of choosing well.

To begin to get a hold on the process of deliberation, let us return to the question posed earlier: What do I do when I choose well? And to prompt some reflection on the reader's part in response to that question -- i.e., to prompt the reader to "test the process of deliberation" -- let us consider two examples.

First, the present paper itself might be viewed as an exercise in deliberation. To assess whether a conscience centered system would be truly worthwhile for Hyde to implement, we must first define precisely what would constitute such a system. What exactly does the option of a conscience centered system entail? Then we must consider the likely consequences of implementing such a system and assess its pros and cons. Of course,

this paper can only be a partial deliberation since I am not the one to make the decision on whether to implement such a system or not. As noted at the outset, implementing a genuine conscience centered system might be either so difficult or so controversial, or both, that it should not be attempted. Whether Hyde has the resources to undertake such a challenging initiative is an issue that I am not competent to address. After all the arguments and counter arguments for implementing a conscience centered system have been carefully weighed, will the deliberative process lead to a definite conclusion? That is, will Hyde conclude that this is definitely something it should do, however challenging it might be? Or, is such a system simply beyond Hyde's reach, and thus should not be attempted? Or, might the issue need further study before a firm decision can be reached? Whatever the outcome, if the decision makers have reached their conclusion in a truly objective manner, then conscience would compel them to take a stand and act on that judgment, whatever it might be. Hopefully, this example brings home to the reader the elements that go into the process of deliberation when it is allowed to proceed to its natural conclusion.

As a second example, consider the case of students deliberating about whether or not to put forth their best effort in Hyde assigned activities. This example differs from the above example in at least three ways. First, as noted earlier, this is a rather truncated example of choosing well. Hyde has already made many of the key decisions. Second, in the case of the students, it is an individual decision that each student makes for himself or herself. Thus, their deliberative process may be rather poorly articulated, and they may be acting out of mixed motives, whether consciously or not. By way of contrast, a conscience centered system is a policy initiative that needs to be very clearly articulated so it can be assessed and debated by all those involved in the decision-making process. Third, as part of "testing the Hyde process," students initially make only a provisional commitment to putting forth their best effort. Their testing of this process takes a long time because it takes a long time for their habitual willingness, i.e., character, to develop. Thus it might appear that the deliberative process itself is inherently a long drawn out affair because it takes such a long time to develop the habitual disposition to choose well. While the deliberative process in difficult cases can indeed be a long drawn out process, that is not inherently so. In deliberating about the conscience centered system, I am assuming, rightly or wrongly, that the intellectual character of the Hyde decision makers is already well developed.

This comparison between the two examples illustrates that deliberation, as with inquiry, is primarily an intellectual, not an emotional, process. Yet, as in the case of inquiry, deliberation is dependent on the proper emotional disposition – i.e., intellectual character – if it is to be allowed to proceed to its natural conclusion. Since the development of intellectual character is the key to carrying out the deliberative process in an objective manner, our approach to the process of deliberation will be fundamentally similar to the approach taken in the process of inquiry. That is, the development of *self transcending feelings* and the role of *best effort* will be the central focus.

Note that despite the differences in the above two examples, in each case, the deliberative process entails identifying options, assessing the likely consequences, and weighing these

options with regard to what is the most worthwhile thing to do. So letting a deliberation proceed to its natural conclusion means identifying all the relevant options, carefully assessing the likely consequences, and weighing all the arguments and counter arguments for the various options – which, in complex cases, may require an extensive knowledge base, great wisdom, and an extended period of time. Eventually, assuming the issue is ripe for a decision and that the deliberative process is doggedly pursued to a conclusion, one is led to a judgment that compels one in conscience to take a stand and act on that judgment. So how does one develop the intellectual character that enables one to pursue this process – a process that can clearly be quite arduous – to its natural conclusion?

At first glance, such a task seems well beyond the capacity of high school students. Moreover, one need only consider the host of complex and controversial issues that confront our society to realize that carrying out the process of deliberation in a truly objective manner can pose an exceedingly demanding task. Some would even argue that objectivity in such issues is an illusion. That is the basic premise underlying the question posed earlier: Who gets to decide what is *truly* worthwhile? However one comes down on the question of the objectivity of values, it is clearly unrealistic to imagine that students will be ready to undertake such deliberations by the time they leave Hyde.

Yet value issues arise everyday in literature and history classes, and sometimes in the applications of science in science classes as well (e.g., global warming). So, in addition to the central deliberation in which all Hyde students are engaged – i.e., whether to consistently put forth their best effort or not – can one also take advantage of these opportunities? If so, these opportunities can be used to begin the process of developing the intellectual character needed to pursue objective deliberations. I would suggest that the answer to this question is definitely yes. Consider the following four proposals.

a. Opinions vs. deliberation. In typical classroom discussions of value issues, students frequently do not go beyond merely voicing their opinions. We live in a very pluralistic society, and such discussions merely drive that point home. People disagree on all sorts of issues. Implicitly, therefore, rather than testing the process of deliberation, such discussions tend to reinforce the belief that values are inherently subjective and that objective deliberation is merely an illusion. Moreover, students often merely parrot conventional wisdom. And they can assert it as if it were completely self evident.

Thus, the first task is to get students to distinguish between merely voicing opinions and repeating conventional wisdom, on the one hand, and engaging in genuine deliberation, on the other. As noted above, when issues are at all complex, classroom discussions are unlikely to be able to resolve them. Nonetheless, students can be made aware of what would be required to resolve them in an objective manner, if sufficient knowledge, wisdom and time were available. They can therefore become aware of the clear difference between engaging in serious deliberation versus merely voicing opinions and restating conventional wisdom. That is an essential first step in testing the process of deliberation.

b. Exposing biases. Biases, whether subtle or not, can be both deeply ingrained and pervasive. To illustrate this point, consider the following two examples.

First, consider the bias of *egocentrism*. The problem here is not a deficient knowledge of reality. The egocentric person can be very shrewd and calculating in pursuing his or her own self interest. Such a person may also recognize that he or she is taking care of “number one” at the expense of others. For some, that may even be a source of pride. For the egocentric person there is clearly a failure to go beyond one’s own narrow self interest and recognize that others also have needs and aspirations that are just as worthy of being met as one’s own. An egocentric bias restricts and distorts one’s horizon -- i.e., one’s cares and concerns -- to the point where truly worthwhile courses of action are simply not recognized. And even if there is an inkling of recognition, such options are simply dismissed. The willfulness resulting from such distortions of horizons are very common among teenagers, although they are by no means restricted to that age group.

Second, consider what we might call *group bias*. We all associate ourselves with a variety of groups: national, racial and ethnic, gender, religious, political or ideological, work related, income level, social class, etc. In itself, such identification is normal and poses no problem. The problem arises when we fail to extend our cares and concerns beyond our own group, possibly seeking even to advance the interest of our own group at the expense of other groups. We may even go so far as to revile other groups, and, in extreme cases, seek to dehumanize them. The most casual survey of human history reveals that this bias has been extraordinarily destructive. Even today, one need only look around the world to see that most of the violence in the world has its roots in group bias. Of course, one does not have to resort to violence to be guilty of group bias. Prejudice and bigotry, sometimes in very subtle forms, are all too common, even when they do not lead to outright violence.

Clearly, a person in the grip of some form of bias is very unlikely to engage in objective deliberation. Moreover, we are often blind to our own biases. Yet others can often quickly spot them. So brother’s keeper can play a key role in exposing biases that surface in classroom discussions. And, once exposed, students can be encouraged to put forth their *best effort* in overcoming their biases. Through such discussions, therefore, students can gradually develop the *self transcending feelings* that constitute the essence of intellectual character and allow them to engage in objective deliberations.

c. Learning to listen to others. As already noted, engaging in deliberation on complex issues can require both an extensive knowledge base and great wisdom. This requirement is likely to tax the resources of any one person. So deliberation often demands a collaborative effort. And that, in turn, demands that we let ourselves truly hear viewpoints different, perhaps radically different, from our own. We each have limited life experiences and perspectives, so we have to be willing to broaden our horizons. That often entails not just listening to our contemporaries, but also voices from the past who have grappled with difficult issues. Letting ourselves truly hear the viewpoint of others does not mean that we have to agree with it. It does mean, however, that we should be able to restate that viewpoint in a way such that those who hold it would acknowledge

our statement as an accurate expression of what they believe. The willingness to let ourselves truly hear viewpoints different from our own and restate them without distortion therefore requires effort, perhaps great effort.

Similarly, the capacity to discern what is genuinely worthwhile in the viewpoint of another person and what is not also requires effort. More to the point, one might say that such discernment requires wisdom. But the development of that wisdom also requires attentive listening to how others weigh the pros and cons of an issue, which, in turn, requires effort. Of course, one should not expect too much of high school students. Life experiences are also essential in the development of wisdom. Yet, hopefully, the thoughtful study of the humanities will also contribute to the development of wisdom.

These are also capacities that students can gradually develop through putting forth their own *best effort*. As these capacities develop, the *self transcending feelings* that constitute intellectual character also gradually develop.

d. Avoid compartmentalizing our thinking. Students, and faculty, can also fail to note inconsistencies between values they subscribe to within the Hyde program and values of the larger culture. That is, they can compartmentalize their thinking.

Consider the ambivalence in our culture with regard to the word *freedom*. To some, it means the freedom to choose well. That meaning entails two distinct beliefs. First, we cannot realize our potential as human beings without taking responsibility for our lives, and that requires freedom. Second, *choosing well*, as used in this essay, implies that there must be values that are *truly* worthwhile.

To others, *freedom* means the freedom to do as one wants, at least insofar as one's own actions do not infringe upon the freedom of others. Both meanings emphasize individual rights. However, the latter meaning often implies an emphasis on individual rights without a corresponding emphasis on responsibilities. It may also imply a deeply held conviction that the *truly* worthwhile is an illusion, so there is no alternative to simply choosing as one wants. However one interprets this latter meaning of freedom, it is clear that there is ambivalence attached to the word *freedom*, and that the two poles of this ambivalence correspond to the difference between willingness and willfulness.

Clearly, Hyde believes in the former of these two meanings. And within the Hyde environment, students are readily able to at least partially grasp the distinction between these two meanings of *freedom*. Coming from our very pluralistic culture, however, they may still implicitly believe that many values are inherently subjective. Put another way, they may simply compartmentalize their values: holding Hyde values within the Hyde environment and holding values pervasive in the culture beyond the confines of the Hyde environment.

Now consider a parallel ambivalence in the word *tolerance*. Corresponding to the freedom to choose well, tolerance implies a deep respect for the inherent dignity and worth of each human person, even when their values and behavior deviate greatly from

choosing well. Corresponding to the freedom to do as one wants, tolerance implies a belief that values are inherently subjective, so there is no objective basis for judging the values and actions of others. Therefore, one should simply withhold judgment.

The latter meaning of the word *tolerance* is obviously inconsistent with brother's keeper. That does not mean, however, that all those within the Hyde environment clearly grasp this inconsistency. People are eminently capable of compartmentalizing their values, even if unconsciously. They can hold Hyde values within the Hyde environment, and hold values pervasive in the culture beyond the confines of the Hyde environment, even when those other values are antithetical to Hyde's own values.

Why is this issue of ambivalence and compartmentalization important? The central objective of a conscience centered system is to lead students to choose well *independently* of Hyde. That is obviously not possible to the extent that they are holding onto values antithetical to Hyde's own values, and those values are not exposed and challenged while at Hyde. Moreover, these subjective meanings of freedom and tolerance *legitimate* merely holding opinions, ignoring biases and restricting oneself to narrow horizons: the first three items just discussed. Put another way, this subjective perspective undermines genuinely testing the process of deliberation. So it is essential to expose and challenge this latter meaning of *tolerance* and the corresponding meaning of *freedom*, both of which are pervasive in our culture. Since these values pervasive in our culture might be held only implicitly, their influence can be quite subtle. Thus, brother's keeper will again be essential in identifying and challenging the influence of these values.

Conclusion. Each of these four proposals contribute to the development of intellectual character by calling for students to put forth their *best effort* in the development of *self transcending feelings*. However, there is still a further question. Do these four guidelines resolve the question of whether the process of deliberation can always be carried out in such a way that the *truly worthwhile* becomes apparent? If by that one means that some complex and controversial issues are definitively resolved via classroom discussions, the answer is obviously no. Nonetheless, these guidelines do make apparent the logic of having students (and faculty) "test the process" and decide that issue for themselves. These guidelines illustrate some common ways in which the process of deliberation is derailed and thereby prevented from coming to an objective conclusion. Put another way, the problems addressed by these four guidelines are each inconsistent with a well developed intellectual character: i.e., with a habitual willingness to pursue the truth wherever it leads. As a consequence, these four guidelines address some of the major reasons for the great pluralism in our society. Thus, faithfully following these four guidelines goes a long way toward defining a *pathway* capable of grasping *truly worthwhile values*. Once students have learned to appreciate the value of following that *pathway*, they can then decide for themselves whether the process of deliberation can *always* be carried out in such a way that the truly worthwhile becomes apparent.

To reinforce that point, it is helpful to note that, with regard to the process of deliberation, we can again make all of the points made in the earlier discussion regarding the process of inquiry. First, just as students can discover that they are inherently

learners, they can also discover that they are inherently decision makers. That is, just as they can discover that the process of inquiry is spontaneous and inherent in their mental make-up, they can also discover the same for the process of deliberation. So, just as they can discover that they are inherently oriented toward seeking the truth, they can also discover that they are inherently oriented toward seeking values that are truly worthwhile.

Second, students can discover that they are beings in tension. Just as there are subjective fears and desires that can derail their quest for the truth, so there are also subjective fears and desires that can derail their quest for truly worthwhile values.

Third, the essence of intellectual character *development*, whether it pertains to the process of inquiry or to the process of deliberation, is putting forth one's *best effort* in the development of *self transcending feelings*.

Fourth, just as conscience kicks in as students become aware that seeking truth through the process of inquiry is genuinely worthwhile, so conscience also kicks in as students become aware that the process of deliberation is the essence of choosing well. In a sense, the process of deliberation encompasses the process of inquiry inasmuch as the pursuit of truth is itself a genuinely worthwhile value.

Fifth, just as brother's keeper would play an essential role for both students and faculty in developing intellectual character through the process of inquiry, so it would also play an essential role for both students and faculty with regard to the process of deliberation. With regard to the four proposals noted above for exposing and challenging attitudes, it is apparent that faculty as well as students can be opinionated; they can be biased; they can be resistant to truly listening to others; and they can find it convenient to compartmentalize their values.

Finally, there is a question of how far it would be feasible to take students in the development of intellectual character through the process of inquiry. Similarly, we must raise the same question with regard to how far it would be feasible to move students toward that goal through the process of deliberation.

In conclusion, therefore, it is apparent that with regard to the development of intellectual character, the processes of inquiry and deliberation need to be considered in parallel. Moreover, it is hopefully now apparent that, at its root, the approach to the development of intellectual character sketched out here is fundamentally similar to the approach to the development of moral character. While this approach to developing intellectual character entails going well beyond Hyde's experiential program, it clearly follows naturally from that program.

B. Well formed conscience. It is now clear what constitutes a well formed conscience. Such a conscience requires first and foremost a highly developed moral and intellectual character. Such a character is constituted by feelings that tend to spontaneously move one beyond subjective fears and desires. A highly developed intellectual character insures the habitual willingness to pursue the relevant knowledge of reality and to sort

through competing arguments in pursuit of the truly worthwhile. If a person is not willing to *act* on what he or she judges to be truly worthwhile, that person is also unlikely to be genuinely willing to pursue the truth wherever it leads. So a highly developed moral character is also essential. In conclusion, therefore, we can say that *a well formed conscience is a conscience formed by the truth*. Clearly, the development of a well formed conscience will allow one to choose well *independently* of Hyde.

Having gone through this rather lengthy analysis with regard to the development of intellectual character, it should also now be abundantly clear that *sincerity* is by no means the equivalent of a well formed conscience. People may feel very deeply about an issue and offer that as a justification for their course of action. Correspondingly, they might claim to be acting out of conscience. And, indeed, they might well experience the force of conscience, even if their understanding of what is worthwhile is distorted, perhaps even grossly distorted. A notion of conscience based simply on sincerity is inherently subjective. It is a notion of conscience *divorced from the truth, not formed by the truth*. Such a notion of conscience depends neither on an adequate knowledge of reality nor on a deliberative process aimed at sorting out what is truly a worthwhile course of action. It is based only on an individual's feelings, irrespective of whether those feelings correspond to the habits of the heart that constitute the habitual willingness of moral and intellectual character. To be sure, we can produce elaborate rationalizations to justify acting on those feelings. But rationalizations are a cover for our actions, not the real motivation. The notion of conscience based on sincerity is quite widespread in our culture. Correspondingly, this subjective notion of conscience contributes greatly to the extreme pluralism in our society. These are important issues that I will go into more fully when I discuss further the sources of ambivalence.

One can also see now why simply advocating best effort, without making fully explicit what that means in the context of intellectual character, is an inadequate guide to choosing well beyond the confines of the Hyde program. Without ascertaining whether an activity is worthy of one's best effort and, if so, how it should be integrated with other activities that are also worthy of one's best effort, such guidance is too subjective. Such guidance might be viewed as merely a variation on sincerity. Of course, one could conceivably adopt an expansive interpretation of best effort and view it as encompassing all the features discussed above in the development of a well formed conscience. However, without making that identity fully explicit, simply advocating best effort is likely to mean little more than being sincere. It is just too subjective.

Once the difference between sincerity and a well formed conscience becomes clear, it also becomes clear that one can not get to a genuine conscience centered system simply by talking a lot about conscience. In this culture, that approach is likely merely to reinforce a subjective notion of conscience. This is a notion that we need to expose and challenge, not reinforce.

On the other hand, it is also now apparent how an extension of the reflection dimension of the action-reflection cycle can lead to a genuine conscience centered system. Through the Hyde program, students are awakened to the value of striving for excellence and

developing their moral and intellectual character. As a consequence, they begin to experience the force of conscience, and their primary motivation for seeking these worthwhile goals gradually shifts from an external one provided by Hyde to an internal one provided by their own conscience. Students themselves then become primarily responsible for developing the feelings that constitute the habitual willingness of moral and intellectual character. With the recognition of the need for an adequate knowledge of reality and the practice of deliberation, students can clearly become aware of what it means to act out of a well formed conscience. Thus, they would not only be able to experience what it means to choose well within the confines of the Hyde program. They would also be able to take ownership of the inherent orientation within themselves that leads them to choose well independently of Hyde. The limited experiences within the confines of the Hyde program could therefore lead to a habitual disposition to act out of a well formed conscience *independently* of Hyde. That would be a major achievement.

Yet, it should also now be apparent that it is truly a daunting task to develop a well formed conscience. A well formed conscience entails a radical transformation of one's horizon. It is a shift from acting on the basis of one's own desires and aversions to acting on the basis of what is truly worthwhile. This transformation is so radical that it might properly be called a *moral conversion*. Correspondingly, the goal of developing such a conscience is not likely to be fully achieved while a student is at Hyde. So we come back to the question posed earlier: *Can students develop a sufficient grasp of that goal, and make sufficient progress toward attaining that goal, that it would serve as an effective guide for their ongoing growth after leaving Hyde?* I would suggest that the answer to that question depends largely on the faculty. As adults, they are, in principle, capable of more fully grasping that goal and of making more significant progress toward achieving it. *If*— and that's a big *if*— it should prove feasible to get the faculty to put forth their best effort in attaining this goal, then I tend to think that the students would be likely to follow their example, not only while at Hyde, but also after leaving Hyde. *Character is caught, more than taught*. But one should not underestimate the difficulty of attaining this goal. It can be a lifetime task to attain this goal for oneself, much less motivating others to pursue it as well.

C. Who am I? Conscience is deeply personal. It lies at the very core of our being. This becomes apparent with the development of a well formed conscience. We become aware that we are moral beings. We discover that we not only choose among various options in life, but that these choices also determine the sort of person we become. In choosing well, we use our freedom as human persons to realize the potential inherent within all of us, including the potential to develop a well formed conscience. The recognition of this potential obviously comes before, perhaps long before, we actualize this potential. We may be inherent learners and decision makers, with an inherent orientation toward seeking truth and value. But that definitely does not mean that we always choose to act in a manner that is true to those essential features of our identity.

As frequently noted in the preceding discussion, the human person is a being in tension. On the one hand, we all experience a great diversity of subjective likes and dislikes that motivate us to act in particular ways. If we act on these subjective desires and aversions,

irrespective of whether they lead us to do things that are genuinely worthwhile or not, then we choose the pathway of willfulness. On the other hand, given our inherent orientation toward truth and value, we are also prompted to transcend these subjective fears and desires and pursue things that are genuinely worthwhile. This is the pathway of willingness. Clearly, these two pathways define two fundamentally different stances toward life. And we can find ourselves torn between these two competing pathways. Ultimately, however, it is the choices we make that determine the sort of person we become. In view of the fact that our inherent orientation toward truth and value are part of our very identity, we might say that, with the development of character, we become *authentically* human.

This conclusion reveals a deeper significance to the two interpretations of *freedom* discussed earlier (p.17). The freedom to do as one wants is merely the freedom from *external* constraints. The freedom to choose well also requires freedom from *internal* constraints: the biases, the fears and aversions, the desires, attachments, and addictions that keep us from realizing our true human identity. Thus, it is a freedom *for* something, not merely a freedom *from* something. It is, therefore, the development of character that gives us the *freedom to become authentically human*.

Finally, note that the answer given above to the question Who am I? concerns features that we all share in common. The freedom to choose is the essence of being a human person. Thus, it is inherent in being human that we are beings in tension and that we can discover ourselves to be moral beings who determine through our own choices the sort of person we are to become. To be sure, we are each unique individuals. And we each share in various group identities. So this answer to our identity is incomplete. Nonetheless, this answer gives us an *absolutely essential piece of our self identity as human persons*. Thus, a genuine conscience centered system, as outlined here, could lead students to both recognize and realize the very core of their identity as human persons.

III. Sources of Ambivalence

A. Hyde's response to the question: Who am I? By way of contrast, Hyde's response to this question tends to be highly individualistic and focuses primarily, if not solely, on unique potential. Correspondingly, conscience is viewed as being *nothing but* a guide to one's unique potential, and character is viewed as being *nothing but* a means to the realization of one's unique potential. What are the implications of such a response? Taken literally, it implies that the only thing that we can take to be truly and objectively worthwhile is unique potential. Implicitly, therefore, all other values are merely a matter of subjective preference.

I am not suggesting that anyone at Hyde really believes that last statement. After all, if one agrees that the development of intellectual character follows naturally from Hyde's experiential program, then the notion of a well formed conscience also follows naturally from that program. That, I believe, is why the mere proposal of a conscience centered system had a certain resonance at Hyde, even before it was clear how to implement such a system. But that relationship between the experiential program and a well formed

conscience implies that the individualistic response noted above is inconsistent with a genuine conscience centered system. That is why I said at the outset that Hyde has “grafted onto” its experiential program some highly individualistic -- and problematic -- concepts and rhetoric. They are “grafted onto” that program, because, if one accepts the arguments just developed in Sections I and II, they do not emerge *organically* from that program. As a consequence, this lack of alignment between what Hyde says and what it does creates a deep ambivalence.

What are the consequences of this ambivalence? I have already emphasized that the development of well formed conscience is truly a daunting task, a task that is likely to extend well beyond one’s days as a student at Hyde. What this ambivalence does is to *short circuit* the moral development needed to attain that well formed conscience. The notion that all values except unique potential are nothing but *subjective* preferences is diametrically opposed to the concept of a well formed conscience, the whole purpose of which is to attain and act on *objective* judgments of value. With the exception of unique potential, Hyde has, perhaps unintentionally, adopted a largely subjective concept of conscience. Thus, if one takes literally Hyde’s individualistic notion of conscience, sincerity suffices as a guide for making moral choices, with the sole exception of unique potential.

Of course, it is an open question how many people take literally Hyde’s individualistic notion of conscience. But if they do not, what purpose does it serve? Moreover, this individualistic notion of conscience is inconsistent with what actually happens in the Hyde experiential program. As discussed earlier, Hyde’s program leads students to act out of conscience in the pursuit of excellence and in the development of their intellectual and moral character. These examples are inconsistent with the belief that conscience is *nothing but* a guide to unique potential, at least if one accepts the above claim that our inherent orientation toward truth and value are part of our very identity as human persons. The obvious need here is to bring what Hyde says into alignment with what Hyde does. As noted at the outset, a genuine conscience centered system can only emerge when this ambivalence is resolved. And that requires an explicit recognition that the answer to the question Who am I? concerns features that we all share in common, as well as features that are uniquely individual.

B. A major challenge. As noted earlier, there is ambivalence in the culture with regard to concepts such as *freedom* and *tolerance*. And without exposing and challenging the concepts that are contrary to Hyde’s own values, it is impossible to genuinely test the process of deliberation. Unfortunately, Hyde’s own ambivalence is reinforcing, rather than exposing and challenging, this ambivalence. This has consequences.

As also noted earlier, given the difficulty of resolving complex and controversial issues, it is entirely appropriate to question whether the process of deliberation can always be carried out in a truly objective manner. Thus, what is being asked here is to genuinely *test* this process, not to blindly accept it. And that may entail a very extended period of time. That extended period of time pertains not only to the time for an individual to test this process but also to grow through that process of testing.

We also need to consider the influence of the culture upon our judgments of what is truly worthwhile. History teaches us that it can take whole cultures a very long time to resolve certain issues. Consider, for example, how many centuries it took the Western world to resolve the issue of slavery, starting with its universal acceptance in the ancient world and going up to how divisive an issue this was in the American experience. Looking back from today's vantage point, it seems amazing that it could have taken so long. Yet even today, there are many who do not see slavery as intrinsically evil: witness the extent of human trafficking in today's world. The point is that whole cultures can be blind to certain moral values. Thus, we must ask: What might be the blind spots of our own culture? It is extraordinarily difficult to see beyond the horizons of one's own culture.

When we add this fact to the inherent limitations of classroom discussions on controversial issues, it becomes absolutely essential to keep the focus primarily on testing the *process* of deliberation, not on the *outcome* of the deliberative process. That is, there must be a strong and unambiguous focus on *intellectual character development*, not the definitive resolution of the complex and controversial issues confronting our society. Put another way, the focus must be on developing in students an understanding and appreciation of the *pathway* of objective deliberation, not the ultimate conclusions that might be reached from doggedly pursuing that pathway.

That is a very demanding task. Can the faculty who guide these discussions hold in abeyance their own, perhaps very strongly held, values, and focus on getting their students to *genuinely test* the *process* of deliberation, as distinct from the *outcome* of the deliberative process? That is, can the faculty keep the focus on the development of intellectual character in their students, not whether one is pro or con on a particular issue? I don't know the answer to that. The difficulty of this task is why I said earlier that the feasibility of implementing a genuine conscience centered system depends on getting the faculty to thoroughly buy into it. That is going to require the faculty to genuinely test for themselves the process of deliberation. How long would that take? Is it really feasible? These are questions that those at Hyde must answer, not me. As noted at the outset, the implementation of a genuine conscience system might be either so difficult or so controversial, or both, that it should not be attempted.

However, one thing is clear. Without clearly and unambiguously resolving the ambivalence in the articulation of Hyde's own philosophy, the chances of success in this venture are virtually zero.

IV. Relationship of Character to Unique Potential

Once the notion of a well formed conscience becomes clear, it is a relatively straightforward matter to resolve the ambivalence within Hyde's program. In that regard, it is instructive to consider three models of the relationship between character and unique potential.

1) The Hillman way. If I recall correctly, James Hillman's book, *The Soul's Code: In Search of Character and Calling*, created quite a stir at Hyde some years back. That struck me then, and still does, as somewhat curious. Hillman often speaks as if he were simply equating character with what Hyde calls unique potential. As he says when speaking of his acorn theory, "I will be using many of the terms for this acorn – image, character, fate, genius, calling, daimon, soul, destiny – rather interchangeably, preferring one or another depending on the context."¹ To be sure, there is much in his acorn theory with which Hyde can agree.

However, we need to clearly distinguish between that which is innate and habits that are acquired. If character were innate, it would make no sense to speak of *developing* one's character. We would have no control over it, anymore than we have control over our unique potential. Our character would be independent of our choices in life. To be sure, the *tendency* toward truth and value, which is the motivating force for the development of intellectual and moral character, is innate in the human person. At least, that is what I have proposed. However, the *tendency* toward truth and value is by no means the only tendency innate in the human person. So the person we ultimately become depends on which tendencies we choose to internalize in our habits of thought and behavior.

Note also that Hillman's view of character is quite compatible with moral relativism. To be sure, he views his acorn theory as genuinely worthwhile. However, his tendency to more or less equate character with unique potential means that our decisions have no moral import except insofar as they affect the realization of one's unique potential. All other values are merely subjective. Correspondingly, the failure to emphasize character development can also make it more difficult to sharply distinguish between unique potential and "doing one's own thing." As Hyde has long maintained, it is difficult to realize one's true unique potential without a well developed character.

2) The Hyde way. Hyde views character as the means to unique potential. While unique potential is innate, character is something that one must develop. Thus, there is a clear distinction between that which is innate and that which must be developed. Correspondingly, there is a strong emphasis on taking responsibility for that which can be developed: namely, one's character. In this regard, there is a clear distinction between the Hyde way and the Hillman way.

Yet there are areas of commonality as well. On the one hand, Hillman also speaks sometimes of character as the means to the realization of unique potential. Moreover, he even speaks sometimes of a person's background as being conducive to the shaping of that person's character, as if it were something that develops. On the other hand, Hyde tends to speak of conscience as if it pertained solely to the realization of one's unique potential. Like Hillman, this would imply that our decisions have no moral import except insofar as they affect the realization of one's unique potential. Thus, despite a clear difference in emphasis, there are significant areas of agreement between these two perspectives.

¹ James Hillman, *The Soul's Code*, (New York: Random House, 1996), p. 10.

I have long believed that there is a deep ambivalence in the Hyde position. On the one hand, Hyde strongly emphasizes taking responsibility for the development of one's character. Correspondingly, to the extent that Hyde's experiential program confronts willfulness within the individual, it is very effective in leading people to adopt an attitude of willingness. And Hyde does not believe that character development should stop merely because one leaves Hyde's program. Rather, growth should be ongoing.

On the other hand, Hyde's restriction of conscience to the realization of unique potential is, in effect, a partial endorsement of moral relativism. If taken literally, all other values become merely subjective. Moreover, relegating character to being merely the means to the realization of unique potential reinforces this endorsement. The failure to confront moral relativism head on leaves untouched significant areas of willfulness and thus significant barriers to ongoing growth. Thus, this artificial restriction of conscience short circuits the ongoing growth and moral development of the human person -- which is directly contrary to the central thrust of Hyde's entire character development program. Furthermore, to the extent that this back-handed endorsement of moral relativism leads one to equate conscience with sincerity, the distinction between unique potential and "doing one's own thing" is also blurred. Thus, I believe that Hyde's arbitrary redefinition of conscience has very unfortunate consequences.

Is this ambivalence in any way essential to the Hyde philosophy? For all the reasons stated in this essay, I obviously don't think so. Consider how this conception of the relationship between character and unique potential originally developed at Hyde. For many years, Hyde described its character development program as "healthy indoctrination." Now a program of indoctrination, healthy or otherwise, leaves something to be desired. So Hyde emphasized unique potential as the corrective to indoctrination, and character as merely the means to the realization of unique potential. This view of character development as "healthy indoctrination" originated before "testing the process" replaced "trusting the process," and before the significance of intellectual character was appreciated and integrated into Hyde's program. Correspondingly, if I'm not mistaken, "healthy indoctrination" has now been dropped from Hyde's vocabulary. Therefore, might it not also be appropriate to reevaluate Hyde's traditional conception of the relationship between character and conscience, on the one hand, and unique potential, on the other? If so, this ambivalence could be readily resolved.

3) The way of a well formed conscience. What is missing from the two preceding perspectives is the recognition of our shared human potential, and how this potential also creates a calling: a vision of the person we should become. A conscience centered system makes this shared human potential explicit. Intellectual and moral character are then no longer *merely* the means toward the realization of our unique potential. They are also the means toward the realization of our shared human potential, toward becoming *authentically* human. Thus, the realization of our unique potential must take place *within* the context of our shared human potential, *not* independently of it.

How do we recognize our unique potential? That is, how do we recognize the ways in which our individual lives are trying to unfold? We each have different temperaments.

We each experience different inclinations. We each have a unique set of life experiences. And gradually we begin to perceive a pattern emerging in the ways in which we react to our unique life experiences. What activities do we find the most fulfilling? What are the roles we envision ourselves playing? Who are the people whom we are most drawn to emulate? From this pattern, a vision of how one's life is trying to unfold gradually emerges --metaphorically, a vision of the oak tree the acorn is destined to become. And for a person with a well formed conscience, the recognition of one's unique potential creates a calling to which one feels compelled to respond.

From the Hyde perspective, there is nothing novel in what the preceding paragraph asserts. The only novel point is making fully explicit that the realization of our unique potential must take place *within* the context of our shared human potential, *not* independently of it.

V. Conclusion

The conscience centered system proposed here offers a *systematic* way of leading students to act of conscience. Moreover, to the extent that a well formed conscience is developed, students are empowered to act out of conscience *independently* of Hyde.

The notion of a well formed conscience also makes explicit a more comprehensive answer to the question of our identity: Who am I? Our inherent orientation toward truth and value reveals that there is a shared human potential, as well as a unique potential. Hyde has long emphasized that the development of character is essential in order to realize one's unique potential. Similarly, the development of moral and intellectual character is also essential in order to realize our shared human potential. Thus, the notion of a well formed conscience reveals that the realization of one's unique potential must take place *within* the context of our shared human potential, *not* independently of it.

A conscience centered system is clearly a natural extension of Hyde's existing program. Best effort and self transcending feelings play essentially the same role in the development of intellectual character as they do in the development of moral character in Hyde's experiential program. In effect, a conscience centered system might be viewed as an extension of the reflection dimension of the action-reflection cycle. Furthermore, since a conscience centered system emerges naturally from Hyde's experiential program, there is no need to "graft onto" that program excessively individualistic conceptions of conscience and character to deal with unique potential.

Despite this continuity, however, the implementation of a conscience centered system would pose a major challenge for Hyde. I have repeatedly emphasized that few, if any, students are likely to attain the goal of developing a truly well formed conscience by the time they leave Hyde. Thus, a central question is whether students could develop a sufficient grasp of that goal, and make sufficient progress toward attaining that goal, that it would serve as an effective guide for their ongoing growth after leaving Hyde.

Beyond that challenge, there is still another. Hyde might already be viewed as a small counter-cultural island in the very large sea of our contemporary culture. The removal of the ambivalence in Hyde's notion of conscience -- i.e., making explicit that conscience is not restricted to unique potential -- will make even more apparent the counter-cultural nature of this small island. And that is almost assuredly an invitation for controversy. As long as Hyde's notion of conscience remained ambivalent, Hyde could conveniently side step a whole range of controversial moral issues. Whether intentional or not, that ambivalence offered Hyde a convenient way to dodge much controversy. Remove the ambivalence, and that convenient dodge is no longer available. So one must ask whether sustaining a strong focus on intellectual character development, as opposed to the outcome of the decision-making process -- i.e., whether one is pro or con on a specific issue -- would suffice to protect Hyde's program from being perceived as biased? Similarly, would challenging each individual to test the process for himself or herself suffice to protect Hyde's program from being perceived as biased? I doubt it.

Consider a person who takes "freedom of choice" as the basis for his or her values and lifestyle. Such a person is likely to grasp quite quickly that the approach proposed here is fundamentally inconsistent with his or her values and lifestyle. So many are likely to reject this approach as being inherently rigged. Of course, the rejoinder to such an objection is, as always: *test the process and see for yourself*. Some might be willing to accept that challenge. However, that willingness is likely to be decidedly less than universal.

The potential for controversy only becomes fully apparent when one focuses on specific issues, in particular, issues of sexual ethics. Thus, I believe that the next step in assessing the feasibility and desirability of implementing a conscience centered system would be to work through some specific examples from the perspective proposed here. Let me emphasize here that I am definitely *not* suggesting that one should shift the emphasis from intellectual character *development* to the *outcomes* of the decision making process. I am merely noting that, despite the emphasis on character *development*, students, faculty and parents are not going to remain oblivious to where the decision making process proposed here seems to be leading. And therein lies the potential for controversy. This paper is already plenty long, however. So, should there be serious interest in such an assessment, it would be best to reserve that exercise for a later date, especially since it might take a while to adequately carry out that exercise.

Even without going through that exercise, one might ask whether the notion of a *well formed conscience* is really consistent with a free society where freedom of conscience is a basic tenet. Is not putting forth that very notion an effort to carve out a privileged niche for a particular point of view? The answer to that question is: yes and no. In a democracy, we must collectively make decisions about how we are to live together and conduct our affairs as a political entity. And while we may disagree on many issues, we rely on debate and persuasion to come to a collective judgment on what to do. In that sense, putting forth the notion of a well formed conscience creates no privileged niche. Those who hold to the belief in such a notion must still compete on an equal footing with those who don't in the free marketplace of ideas.

On the other hand, the notion of a well formed conscience does indeed attempt to carve out a privileged position for that which is *truly worthwhile*. The essence of *choosing well* is to choose that which is truly worthwhile. As we have seen, however, the process of decision making to ascertain the truly worthwhile can be a very arduous task that can require an extended period of time. Human beings are extraordinarily complex, and we live in an extraordinarily complex society. And given the very pluralistic nature of our society, the conclusion is likely to be controversial. Nonetheless, the notion of a well formed conscience does indeed establish a clear goal for decision making.

How then should students be educated for citizenship in a free, democratic and very pluralistic society where there is no widely accepted source of moral authority? In the early days of the Republic, it was thought sufficient to rely on the family, the church and the local community to provide a sound education for citizenship. In today's world, however, that approach is hardly sufficient to keep students from absorbing uncritically the perspective of moral relativism, just from the very pluralistic nature of our society. That subjective perspective tends to focus on satisfying one's own desires, not the common good: i.e., the genuinely worthwhile. This self centered perspective also tends to be strongly reinforced by the entertainment and advertising industries whose motivation is profit through catering to these individual desires, not education for citizenship. So might the approach outlined here have something better to offer in this regard? I won't try to develop this line of thought further here. Yet it seems worth raising the issue. A conscience centered system clearly has implications beyond individual decision making.

Finally, we might ask how the development of a well formed conscience relates to Hyde's Humility Principle: We trust in a power and purpose beyond ourselves. Is the development of a well formed conscience an effort to bring ourselves into alignment with a power and purpose beyond ourselves? On the one hand, testing the process and judging for oneself hardly seems to rely on placing one's trust in some undefined power and purpose beyond oneself. On the other hand, there are some presuppositions underlying a well formed conscience that might suggest otherwise. For example, one might ask why the universe we live in, including we humans, is intelligible, and therefore capable of being understood by the process of inquiry. Similarly, one might ask about the origin of true values, which I have claimed are capable of being grasped by the process of deliberation. Science presents us with a view of reality devoid of meaning and purpose. Yet *true* values are precisely what a well formed conscience is supposed to discern. So is the notion of a well formed conscience merely an illusion? If so, what does that say about the Hyde program itself, from which the notion of a well formed conscience seems to emerge naturally? Or, does science give us only a partial view of reality? And is the development of a well formed conscience an effort to bring ourselves into alignment with some power and purpose beyond ourselves after all?

In a similar vein, one might note that Hyde invests unique potential with great meaning and purpose. Yet the unfolding narrative of any individual life is merely a single thread in the vastly larger tapestry of human history. Are we to say that the individual threads

are replete with meaning, but the larger tapestry is devoid of meaning? Moreover, from the perspective of the larger universe, human history itself is merely a vanishingly brief episode on a seemingly insignificant planet in a remote corner of the universe. So, once again, we see that reflecting on the phenomenon of conscience raises issues well beyond the realm of individual decision making.

ⁱ Walter E. Conn, *Conscience: Development and Self-Transcendence*, (Birmingham, AL: Religious Education Press, Inc., 1981); Brian Cronin, *Value Ethics: A Lonergan Perspective*, (Nairobi: Consolata Institute of Philosophy Press, 2006); Michael Shute and William Zanardi, *Improving Moral Decision-Making*, (Halifax: Axial Press, Inc., 2003).