PART THREE

Routes to Moral Truth:
Evaluating Moral Reality
Creative Imagination

The Evaluational Phase of Ethics...
The spokes of the wheel model represent the evaluational resources through which moral consciousness can unfold. As we saw in chapter 6, the reality-revealing questions uncover the moral circumstances. Those questions are used "to gather the evidence." In this chapter, we discuss what the spokes do to evaluate the evidence we have gathered. The spokes help us examine and judge what the reality-revealing questions uncover. They signify ways in which our pluriform consciousness can illuminate the reality unveiled by the expository process. The spokes represent the ways in which we can expand moral awareness and evaluate the moral situation. We must always remember that incompleteness and insensitivity are the bane of ethical inquiry. Comprised of both an expository and an evaluational phase, the method here hopes to counter these hazards. The spokes, therefore, represent systematic concern for the way we evaluate. They can be misused, particularly if they are uncritically accepted or if one is overemphasized to the neglect of the others. However, it is the potential positive use of all the spokes that is being stressed. The spokes give us greater moral awareness and sensitivity when uncovering the circumstances.

Ethics and the Creative Imagination...
Creative imagination is the supreme moral faculty. Through it we break out of the bondage of the current state of things and perceive new possibilities. Creative imagination offers us new insights. If creation includes discovery, moral creation implies moral discovery that enhances moral growth. The creative act can transform us into morally sensitive human beings. The process of moral discernment is not just a matter of siting in judgment of reality as it passes by. Moral thinking at its best perceives goods that have not yet existed and brings them into being in the creative act. Creative imagination is especially allied to the reality-revealing question that deals with alternatives and with the moral growth that new alternatives may provide.

Creativity has not had much attention in ethical reflection. This unfortunate fact is partly due to the tendency to shy away from the
power of creative insight, a power that can easily upset the accepted and common order that we have come to rely on. Much ethical theory has been content to direct thought to what is, neglecting what can and should be. It seems easier to repeat past formulas and decisions than to seek new methods and answers. Creative imagination can give us new alternatives to situations that need new solutions. It can also give us a new moral orientation. Most ethical methods emphasize our rational capabilities and prefer a set way of moral judgment rather than the creative way.

Creative insight is a surprise and a challenge. There is always something unpredictable in creative intelligence. It is a leap into unexpected insight. It opens doors we previously did not know were there. Before we discuss the place of creativity in ethics, we will touch upon its meaning and nature and briefly clarify the conditions that seem to set the stage for its moral breakthrough.

*What Is the Creative Act?...*
One aspect of the creative act is that it shows a likeness between two seemingly different and unrelated things; another is that it reveals a hidden order and meaning that would otherwise go unnoticed, and yet another is that its expression is new or original. In one sense, creation is an act of fusion. Professor J. Bronowski, in his book *Science and Human Values*, has given attention to the nature of the creative mind. Bronowski turns to the famous creative incident of young Newton, who saw an apple fall while he was sitting in the garden of his widowed mother. What came to Newton was not the thought that the
apple must be drawn to the earth by gravity, since that thought was older than Newton. "What struck him," Bronowski observes, "was the conjecture that the same force of gravity, which reaches to the top of the tree, might go on reaching out beyond the earth and its air, endlessly into space. Gravity might reach to the moon: this was Newton's new thought; and it might be gravity which holds the moon in her orbit." Bronowski concludes that Newton had discovered a previously hidden likeness and that creativity can be seen as "a hand reaching straight into experience and arranging it with new meaning."

Bronowski's theory is enlightening for ethics. In moral discovery there is the experience of a new unity through a recognition of previously missed likenesses. For example, take the belated discovery that women are not essentially domestic and sexual functionaries but persons with an infinity of possible meaning beyond their culturally conditioned roles. This discovery has taken longer to establish itself than the discovery of electricity, nuclear physics, or lunar gravity. After all, women and men are more alike than apples and moons, and it should have been easier to make the connections. In the recognition of the genuine and full personhood of woman, there is an insight reaching into human experience and giving it new meaning. There is a new realization of the fundamental similarity of persons, a realization that is more profound than any culturally assigned system of roles. The creative feminist is moving beyond prejudices and presenting a new and promising unity. Something similar happens as we shuffle off our biases and discover afresh the true, uncaricatured humanity of persons of other races or persons of a different sexual orientation.

Arthur Koestler has also produced an insightful study on the nature of the creative act. Like Bronowski, he stresses the discovery of hidden likenesses, but Koestler introduces a number of other important aspects. Likeness says something, but for our purposes it remains an incomplete explanation of what happens in creative moral movements. In his book The Act of Creation, Koestler says that the creative act "is an act of liberation — the defeat of habit by originality" and that it allows us "to attain to a higher level of mental evolution." He adds that the creative event is not unrelated to work and preparation, as when Pasteur hit upon what should have been an obvious idea of extending the notion of vaccination for smallpox to inoculation for other diseases. Pasteur's creative insight involved the blending of two elements, and he was able to see their possible linkage because he had a prepared mind. The creative insight or act, however, does not just happen as though it were determined by favorable conditions. Creative insight occurs in ways that are not easily inspected. Although inventions do influence one another, there is, nevertheless, a solitary leap taken by the creative mind in spite of all that it owes to others. No
matter how hard one labors, the creative moment comes only after a period of incubation, the length of which is not in our control. One must work and then wait, with the waiting as important as the working.

Koestler’s ideas are helpful for understanding breakthroughs in moral imagination. They can be applied to an example of moral creativity taken from the life of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. His notion of “non-violent direct action” and its use were influenced by Gandhi’s teachings on satyagraha (a term that means a way of holding on to moral truth while resisting opposition through nonviolent means). King introduced a new urgency to the need for social and individual justice. He was responsible for revolutionary creative changes in moral America. Even though human rights and the concept of equality for all were incorporated into the U.S. Constitution, historically they were granted only to certain privileged groups. Even after the abolition of slavery, real human and civil equality was not realized by all and still has not been. To have followed through on the ideals of justice and equality would have meant condemning slavery from the very beginning of America’s independence.

King’s creative moral achievement and breakthrough were not unrelated to the moral insights that he received from other sources (religious, biblical, and philosophical). King’s was the prepared mind that advanced the political and philosophical ideals upon which the American Constitution was formed and by which the American Revolution was motivated. In turn, King’s morally creative powers helped initiate the woman’s liberation movement and the struggle for rights among other minorities. Creative insight is liberating. It can prepare us for further moral growth and overcome well-entrenched habits of moral misunderstanding. It gives us an opportunity to see possible connections that otherwise would go unnoticed. Creative moral insight is an act of understanding in a new way.

In a true sense, the moral discovery of the fundamental equality of persons, including persons of other races, was a discovery not entirely unlike the discoveries of Newton and Pasteur, individuals influenced by past insights. It was not entirely like them either. The law of gravity or the practice of inoculation is one thing and the value and rights of persons, another. One should suspect that the approach of creativity to moral discovery would be as distinctive as the discovery itself. Creativity implies insight and originality. It can also imply courage and strength — characteristics that moral creativity often demands.

Creative imagination is the power to perceive the possible amid the actual and begin the process to bring the possible into being. Creativity is a promising power that is native to us. It is a power of hope and of new beginnings. Our times are not without good portents regarding the unfolding of this capacity. We admire creative talent and esteem the
inventor, even though we may withdraw from creative movements that disturb or challenge our security. It is important for ethical method to emphasize that there is a creative impulse in every one of us, a desire for the new and the not yet. Since we are never satisfied only with what is, we cannot live without creative imagination. Creativity keeps persons and cultures from becoming stagnant. Sloth, on the other hand, is the attitude that counters and prevents creativity by lowering our expectations and blunting our searching instincts. The penalty of sloth is boredom that comes when we are denied newness. Boredom can send us back on the creative search. We can temporarily overcome that boredom with superficial newness, but that will soon leave us worse off. Our intellectual and volitional hunger is such that even fulfilling experiences have a bitter edge to their sweetness. We are never permanently satisfied. This fact causes within us a restlessness that becomes the wellspring of creativity. We cannot live without creative imagination. Our radical insatiability is our hope that the power of creativity will not disappear. Much more is yet to be created. The closed mind constitutes a major hazard to the liberation of the creative spirit.

Creativity is not just an intellectual ability. Its roots are in affectivity. This fact is true for all creativity but even more so for moral creativity. Creative moral imagination is born of the affections and of the humanizing power of hope. Thus it is inherently related to the foundational moral experience of the value of persons and their environment. Creative moments of moral insight reach more deeply into that experience and express more completely its meaning. Every creative advance in the application of the foundational moral experience is an affirmation of what it means to be more fully human. Moral creativity gives us new insights and helps us become aware of alternatives by offering creative solutions.

**Conditions for Moral Creativity...**
We cannot force creativity. We cannot command it or order it into being. What we can do is to search out the conditions that are conducive to creative achievement. To make our institutions, workplaces, and professional settings arenas of fruitful moral creativity, we can provide or encourage these preconditions of creativity. The following six factors are presented as conducive to the flowering of creative genius: enthusiasm (or excitement), quiet passivity, work, malleability, kairos, and at-home-ness.

*Enthusiasm* is the first condition for moral creativity. In fact excitement is the precondition for all success, for without it there will be no creative stirrings. Only those who are alive with humanizing love and care, with enthusiasm about the value and goodness of life will lead us across new thresholds and expand the horizons of moral conscious-
ness. The apathetic are constitutionally disqualified. Morally creative persons can be disturbing to the uninspired and the forces of moral staidness can react violently against creative insight.

Enthusiasm is a way of feeling, an excitement that produces affect. Those affected by enthusiasm begin caring in different ways and about different things. The creative moment, however, can also be lost because excitement is not easily sustained. If moral creativity is not nourished it will pass away and the potential moral growth will vanish. Creative moral insight is perishable. But it begins with an enthused attitude about moral value. Administrators, managers, and teachers who communicate genuine enthusiasm open the door to creativity.

In apparent contradiction to the first, the second condition of creativity is quiet passivity. The contradiction is only apparent. Enthusiasm alone does not produce the creative act. Receptivity is an important factor, as the French philosopher Jacques Maritain points out in his work *Creative Intuition in Art and Poetry*. There is motion in artistic creation, Maritain says, the motion that puts notes on scores or color on canvas, but the creative experience “is of itself a sort of natural contemplation, obscure and affective, and implies a moment of silence and alert receptivity.” Creative passivity is not to be confused with inertness or with idleness. It is an inner calm with a silence that opens us in receptivity to the powers of creative imagination. The stillness of creativity is one of the ecstatic intensities of life. No contradiction is meant here. At times there must be an inner quiet or calm that lets things happen. Surprisingly, the word “school” comes from the Greek *scole*, which means leisure. Leisure, not frenzy, allows the mind to open. Sometimes it is while we wait — or even while we sleep! — that the creative insight finds entry into our distracted minds.

Ethics could deafen itself with the noise of its own work. If we think of knowing only as something we do (as intellectual and discursive work) and never as something we can receive in quiet but alert passivity, then analytical and methodological thinking is the sole route to moral wisdom. But it is not. Moral truth can emerge from the nonrational depths of creativity, a valid source that is other than the rational. For creative insights, there must be some repose from the strain of the working mind. We must allow moments of rest or quiet for the possibility of creative insights. There is a message here for us who live in a society that glorifies work, the “art of doing” and the “art of achieving.” We also need the “art of contemplation.” We have an intellectual need for silence and receptivity. Creative moral knowledge requires more than doing. It also requires a quiet passivity. This is why the idea of the sabbatical should be part of every profession. Professions must be creative, but they will not be if genius is bottled up in busyness.
Paradoxically, the third condition for creativity is *work*. Work can prepare the mind for creative insight. If creativity involves, among other things, the discovery of hidden connections, then the more you know the more prepared you are and the better chance you have to discover these connections. Creativity includes the power to discern new possibilities within the given. Work, however, not only prepares the mind for new possibilities. It also helps prepare the disciplined attitude needed to see these possibilities through. The more attuned you are to what is, the more readied you become to see what might be. Work is part of creative readiness.

The fourth condition for moral creativity is *malleability*, the willingness to allow our moral attitudes to be shaped by the continuing growth process of the foundational moral experience. The term applies both to individual personality and to groups within a cultural setting. A placid moral milieu where no major questions are outstanding or where agreement on the values of life has gelled, will stimulate no creative movement in personal or social moral consciousness. Being unsettled by value collisions is fertile ground for growth in moral thought. Openness to moral values and the alacrity to grow in moral insight are affirmations of creative ethics. For creativity, agitation is preferable to inert serenity. Malleability helps us recognize serious value conflicts and helps us solve them in creative ways.

The fifth condition for moral creativity is what we can call *kairos*, a term rich enough to be brought in directly from the Greek. *Kairos* can be translated "time," but that is precisely why we need the Greek word intact. Time for us tends to mean chronological time, for which the Greeks had a special word: *chronos*. *Kairos*, on the other hand, means time as a moment filled with special and opportune content. It means the right moment, the right time for doing something. Obsessed as we moderns are with chronology, having organized life around the clock, it is hard to envision that time, for many of the ancients, was not primarily a matter of succession, but of content. The names for the months, for example, often described what happened in those months — the month of ripening ears, the month of flowers, the month of perennial streams, and so forth.

*Kairos* is the time when circumstances are such that *opportunity* is presented to us. A sense of *kairos* is a sense of knowing when the time is at hand to move beyond inadequate solutions and when the time is ripe for creative insights. It also knows when circumstances are not ready for the reception of the new and the creative. *Kairos* can be helpful especially at the corporate and political levels of life where decisions have massive effects for good or ill. It implies a watchful patience and a special alertness to the proper moment, to the proper timing. It is possible that the creative person will arrive, draw the creative conclusion,
and be ignored. This fact can happen anywhere, in science, in politics, in business, and in all other areas of human behavior. Unfortunately, creative breakthroughs are easily missed or rejected. But *kairos* gives us a sense of knowing when to act again and even a sense of knowing how to encourage favorable conditions for the acceptance of morally creative insights.

The final condition for moral creativity can be called *at-home-ness*, the absence of alienation. The process of alienation is completely antithetical to the process of moral creation. A professional setting or any workplace marked by alienation will discourage creativity. Creation discovers and reaches out; alienation separates, turns in and away. Moral creation is a force of human meaning and integration, a force that connects the previously unconnected in the direction of greater and deeper unity. Alienation disintegrates and prevents the growth of the foundational moral experience. It is a denial of moral relationship and responsibility. It breaks down connections. If creative power is a sign of moral growth and if it enhances kinship with all that is, *at-home-ness* is one of its characteristics. To move away from moral alienation and to break down the artificial barriers that we build and revere on the basis of nation, race, sex, status, or age is to be readied for creativity. *At-home-ness* prepares us to know what only those who are and feel at-home can know. A stranger does not know what is, much less what could be in a home. At-home-ness is a prerequisite for creativity.

**Creativity and Alternatives…**

Moral creativity may be stimulated by the perceived value of that one alternative that would have been lost had creativity not been present. Creative imagination can propose a solution that develops a possible alternative. Thus it can enlarge moral reality and our ethical consideration of a case. When someone cares enough about a value alternative, creative imagination goes to work, for love and caring can be a source for moral creativity. Moral imagination is grounded in the affective foundational moral experience. This experience grows through moral creativity. A weakness at the level of this foundational experience can prevent creative imagination from ever expressing itself. If we do not care, we do not see alternatives. It is just that simple.

**Imagination Astray…**

Nothing is so sacred that it cannot be profaned. And that includes creative imagination. We can be monstrously as well as morally imaginative. The present world arsenal with its capacity to blot out all life on the planet many times over is a macabre tribute to the misuse of imagination. With all this achieved, evil imagination is not still. Far-fetched schemes are theoretically probed about more diversified modes
of killing, including such things as guided tidal waves, changes effected in the electrical environment to affect brain performance, laser death rays, and almost unstoppable, computerized, robot "tanks" containing a rich repertoire of nuclear and other kill-power.

Imagination can enhance life or end it. Science in itself cannot be blamed for the perversions of our possibilities. Science is performed and implemented by human beings. It is as much a product of society as it is an influence on it. We would hope that the power of moral imagination prevails as a source of whatever humanizing good the future of persons might hold. Greater moral sensitivity is achieved through creative moral imagination. It is our primatian talent as moral beings. We can change the world into a desert or a garden. The moral choice is ours.