

METAPHYSICS AS A FUNDAMENTAL POISE

Francisco Vicente Galán Vélez

There are in our lives happy and unexpected circumstances.¹ In the mid 1990's, I overcame a fear and decided to participate in a mini-workshop that Phil conducted at Boston College. The fear originated from his interventions in the Lonergan workshops beginning in 1991 (the first year I attended). I did not understand a word he said and found him very intimidating. But in the mini-workshop, I discovered another side of Phil—so smart, so sharp, so kind, and so peculiar. For example, he asked us on the first day to give him a photo of ourselves. The great thing was that I could talk with him after the sessions. We talked about tennis and especially about soccer. In one of those talks, I was inspired to invite him to come to Mexico to be a guest lecturer in our Master's in Humanistic Education, a program inspired by the works of Lonergan and oriented especially towards university teachers. I hesitated to invite him since my appropriation of Lonergan's works was deficient and the students' background was minimal. But Phil immediately and enthusiastically agreed to come.

On three different occasions Phil came to Mexico during the summer for almost two weeks. Those events were completely unforgettable for those of us who had the opportunity to be there. His many examples and passion for teaching were extraordinary. He was simply from another planet. Time and again he remembered Lonergan, imitating his voice, repeating significant quotations, recalling his numerous struggles, and reminiscing about his passion for music.² What the topic of those lectures were is difficult to say. He spoke of the redress of poise, an existential stance. He celebrated the beauty of art and the great achievements of the human spirit passionately and reverently, as the topic was education, self-appropriation, human excellence, and self-transcendence.

¹ Phil took on two activities in Mexico. He taught in a master's degree program at Universidad Iberoamericana and he mentored a Mexican student.

² Phil talked about Von Karajan who knew perfectly the Beethoven symphony that he was going to conduct, but he was excited because he considered that it will be something new. That was Phil. He could tell you line by line all *Insight* and *Method in Theology*. But he asked for a hotel with a bathtub, where he spent hours reading *Insight*, because it was new. He was reading it for the first time.

Nobody understood fully what Phil said.³ He repeated several times before the break: “Have I been sufficiently obscure?” But in another sense all of us got the invitation, because Phil incarnated *die Wendung zur Idee* (“the displacement towards system”⁴). In an existential and highly theoretical way, Phil talked about the poise that a teacher has to have. He illustrated this with references to Yo-Yo Ma and Nadia Boulanger.⁵ He invited us to self-appropriation, to authenticity. Quoting Lonergan, he repeated several times: “When the baby laughs, the whole baby laughs.” It was an invitation to “Ken Mastery rather than Zen Mastery,”⁶ “a sublation of all that is good about the biographic attitude of Zen to a new tradition of Ken wisdom.”⁷ Phil was emphasizing something very important in the Zen Tradition: “patience in genuine human growth.”⁸

The central topic was what he called the “Childout Principle” (COPON) in education: “When teaching children geometry, one is teaching children children.”⁹ He referred to the story of Helen Keller and her teacher Ann Sullivan. Helen was completely shocked when, after repeatedly raising a question, she discovered the meaning of Ann’s touches. Things have a name, an intelligibility. And the most important someone was calling her. It was a word, a speaker and a

³ One problem was English, because in spite of the fact that the university required competency in English, the level of many students was not adequate. The other problem was Phil making references to Joyce’s *Finnegans Wake*.

⁴ See the editors’ footnote 4, CWL 14, 133. If you don’t understand English well, you understand Phil’s bodily movements, his dry mouth when speaking, his toes moving in his sandals, and his “mmmmm” when he enjoyed food or a drink.

⁵ For Serena Williams and a goal keeper, see McShane, *Futurology Express*, 23.

⁶ McShane, *A Brief History of Tongue*, 53. Phil explains on this page that ‘ken’ is related to knowing in Scottish English or in Germanic languages.

⁷ McShane, *Lack in the Beingstalk: A Giants Causeway* (South Brookfield, NS: Axial Publishing, 2006) 54.

⁸ *A Brief History of Tongue*, 53. With the invitation to patience, but also satire and humor: “‘When will I reach enlightenment master?’ ‘In ten years perhaps.’ ‘But if I try harder?’ ‘Then, perhaps, in twenty.’” Michael Barnes, “Traditions of Spiritual Guidance Masters and Mastery in Zen,” *The Way*, 1986, 246, quoted by McShane, *Lack in the Beingstalk: A Giants Causeway*, 44.

⁹ *Futurology Express*, 41. In Mexico Phil didn’t use the name “Childout Principle.”

listener.¹⁰ “We are forward to puzzling about the meaning of *question raised* (...) ‘when you are raising children you are raising questions.’”¹¹

While continually remembering and teaching Lonergan’s works to us, he was teaching us ourselves, encouraging us to recover the nostalgia of our childhood. And we have to do the same to be authentic,¹² without pretending to be someone we are not, and do so efficiently.¹³ In one lesson in Puebla he shared this apt phrase: “Efficiently cherish your quest and ideas.”¹⁴

Metaphysics of Proportionate Being

Phil helped me with my doctoral dissertation, and I was honored to have him as one of the readers of my dissertation. He made me discover, very kindly, that in spite of the fact that I thought that I was a converted man, I was still a pretending man. My dissertation, which later became a book, focused on Lonergan’s metaphysics as a meta-methodology for a post-metaphysical age. Phil helped at the very end of the writing process. Two important questions came from him: What is the relation of *Insight’s* metaphysics of proportionate being to method? I had heard that Lonergan had abandoned metaphysics, but I had not worked on that topic. The second question was related to this and to another key point, one which I have forgotten completely.

¹⁰ I will never forget the class in which he spoke about the Trinity as a conversation, focusing on these questions: When was the last time that you were in a good conversation? When was the last time you understood? When was the last time you spoke? When was the last time that you really listened to someone, and that you felt the other also listened to you?

¹¹ *Futurology Express*, 64–65.

¹² As Lonergan taught in his lectures on existentialism, which Phil edited, the major call of existentialist thinkers was for authenticity. See *Phenomenology and Logic*, CWL 18, 189–91, 300–10.

¹³ We have here a transcendental precept: Be effective. Phil would quote Mathew 10:16: “I am sending you out like sheep among wolves. Therefore be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves.” And also Luke 16:8: “For the people of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own kind than are the people of the light.”

¹⁴ Phil was quite beyond us, completely intellectually lonely, but at the same time completely with us, telling jokes, answering our questions, listening to our stories and complaints.

In *Insight* we read that “metaphysics is the conception, affirmation, and implementation of the heuristic structure of proportionate being.”¹⁵ I had written that phrase several times. Interpreting and explaining that definition was the major task of my dissertation. But what is implementation? What does chapter 18 do in relation to the previous four? Implementation has never been conceived as a metaphysical task. “(...) even if Lonergan’s work *Insight* be unknown to you, you can appreciate that the occurrence of the word *implementation* in the following definition of metaphysics is unusual, perhaps even surprising.”¹⁶

When I transformed my dissertation into a book, Phil wrote the prologue and called it “The Philosophic Adventure Turns Forward.”¹⁷ He begins the essay by noting the importance of being in a certain mood. Phil quotes from what he presented several times as a central page of *Method in Theology*, “history in the style of Burckhardt rather than Ranke.”¹⁸ Phil says that we need to move into that mood.

Metaphysics has to do with *adventure*, and this is a disturbing word because “in the contexts in which it occurs and to which it refers, it inclines us, as it were forward, to attend to the central bent of Lonergan’s thinking life: a bent to change, to rescue, history.”¹⁹ That is why it is so important to focus on implementation as essential to metaphysics and to recover it as a meta-methodology.

My book didn’t delve into chapter 18 of *Insight*, but Phil mentioned that asking what should be done is a part of metaphysics. “I touch on that complexity briefly by posing the question, Is *The Perfectibility of Man*

¹⁵ Lonergan, *Insight*, CWL 3,416.

¹⁶ McShane, *Lack in the Beingstalk: A Giants Causeway*, 14.

¹⁷ “La Aventura Filosófica gira hacia adelante,” in Francisco V. Galán, *Una metafísica para tiempos posmetafísicos: la propuesta de Bernard Lonergan de una metametodología* (México: Universidad Iberoamericana, 2014) 18–23. Rodrigo González translated it into Spanish, and James Duffy revised the translation. I will quote the page in the book where it appears in Spanish.

¹⁸ Bernard Lonergan, *Method in Theology* (New York–London: Herder and Herder/Darton, Longman & Todd, 1972) 250. McShane wrote in the footnote about this page: “It is the page where Lonergan gives detailed instructions for the discomfiting enterprise of the dialectic community struggling towards fresh advances in the cyclic foundations of the task of global collaboration.” *Una metafísica para tiempos posmetafísicos*, 22.

¹⁹ *Una metafísica para tiempos posmetafísicos*, 19.

central to the problems of classical metaphysics?”²⁰ This question appeared in western philosophical tradition from Plato to American pragmatism, but it seems to be a forgotten idea nowadays.

Then Phil mentioned the problem of the transition from *Insight* to *Method in Theology*. He mentioned the anecdote of Lonergan telling him that he could not put all of *Insight* in chapter 1 of *Method*. Lonergan did not abandon metaphysics, so a major effort to read *Insight* is needed to get a decent sense of *Method in Theology*. Phil also mentioned that chapter 2 of *Method in Theology* is in consonance with my omission of chapter 18 of *Insight* in my dissertation. If we don't want to just vaguely consider the transcendental precept “Be responsible,” what is needed “is a powerful analysis of that dynamics that would do for the 21st century what Thomas did so magnificently in the ‘sixty three articles in a row’ of the *Prima Secundae*.”²¹ So Phil insisted on the necessary mood for doing metaphysics today, quoting page 53 of *Method in Theology*: “Being intelligent includes a grasp of hitherto unnoticed or unrealized possibilities.” He insisted that understanding “hitherto unnoticed or unrealized possibilities” is the challenge indicated on the central pages 250 and 251 of *Method in Theology*.

Phil remarked a number of times on the importance of an effective control of meaning in history. That's why for him chapter 7 of *Insight* is a precursor to the later chapters on metaphysics. We find something similar in Plato's resolution not to leave everything to his teacher Socrates. The exaltation of contemplation, *theoria*, is to return to the cave in order that all might leave it. Cosmopolis is a hope in spite of cumulative decline.

For Phil there is a deep unity in Lonergan's major texts, and of course he never abandoned the project of reversing decline while promoting progress. Functional specialties is a key insight that is not in *Insight*. However, metaphysics is not abandoned but sublated. Functional specialties are the redress of poise, the building of the tower, the rebirth of a profound sense of a new tongue. It brings the issue of luminous ethical self-appropriation into the full concrete context of our human global responsibility. And Phil closed his prologue with these words: “It becomes indeed—returning thus to the full reach of Galan's work—the key, the

²⁰ *Una metafísica para tiempos posmetafísicos*, 20. Phil alludes to John Passmore's book *The Perfectibility of Man*.

²¹ *Una metafísica para tiempos posmetafísicos*, 21.

keystone, issue of any metaphysics. It identifies the possibility of effective implementation as the heartbeat of any view that claims to come to grips with humanity's story."²²

Thank you Phil McShane for your invitation to a luminous futurology, in which COPON will be cyclic.²³

²² *Una metafísica para tiempos posmetafísicos*, 22.

²³ McShane, *Futurology Express*, 41.